THE WORKS OF LOUIS DE BLOIS

COMMONLY CALLED LUDOVICUS BLOSIUS

II.—COMFORT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED

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COMFORT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED

(CONSOLATIO PUSILLANIMIUM)

By

LUDOVICUS BLOSIUS

Translated from the Latin

by

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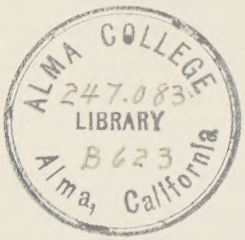
Of the Order of Preachers



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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THE title of this book is attractive—COMFORT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED. Many will exclaim directly it catches their eye: "That is exactly what I want!" There are so many trials and sorrows in our earthly pilgrimage that we feel:

> Comfort's in heaven; and we are on the earth,
> Where nothing lives but crosses, cares and grief.*

Comfort, true and solid, is often the soul's need.

The faint-hearted! How many there are! Truly may we say, the faint-hearted *we have always with us*. In fact, is there any one, however brave a soldier of Christ, who is not sometimes afraid, cast down, discouraged, faint-hearted—or at least sorely tempted so to be?

In the spiritual life success is, for the most part, invisible; the merit and reward is laid up in heaven far away; the failures are so many, so evident, so humbling, so wearisome, the cross so sore a weight, that discouragement with men of good will is one of the commonest as well as the most dangerous forms of temptation. We are all inclined to cry out in

* King Rich. II, Act 2, Sc. 2.

the anguish of our souls, and the darkness of the valley, and the disgust of the human spirit which wants to walk by sight and not by faith:

*O when wilt thou comfort me?**

Is there no balm in Galaad, or is there no physician there? Why then is not the wound of the daughter of my people closed?†

Blosius answers this pitiful cry of the children of God by this book. Here is balm, he says, of the most consoling kind. Here I lead you, poor faint-hearted soul, to the most kind and skilful Physician, who, when on earth, went about healing all diseases; and, if you will only go to him with loving confidence, he will never fail, but you will find that now as ever:

He healeth the broken of heart,
And bindeth up their bruises.
The Lord looseth them that are in chains;
The Lord enlighteneth the blind.
The Lord lifteth up those that are cast down;
The Lord loveth the righteous.
The Lord is just in all his ways,
And holy in all his works.
The Lord is nigh to all that call upon him;
To all that call upon him in truth.‡

Blosius himself, taught by the loving Master and having drunk deeply of his spirit, is a

* Ps. cxviii, 82. † Jer. viii 22.
‡ Ps. cxlvi 3; cxlv 7; cxiv 17.

learned and skilful physician. His book is not merely a number of sweet sayings. He knows how and when to be severe, he knows how to use the knife and the cautery. He is by no means one *to sew cushions under every elbow, and make pillows for the heads of persons of every age to catch souls.** Not one word does he say to make men easy in their sins, or to promise them impunity if they cherish in their hearts wilful affection for any sin, however venial it may appear.

He addresses only *men of good will*, those, namely, who have declared war with sin, and though with plenty of defects, miseries and imperfections, and perhaps falling sometimes more seriously, never go on living in sin, and have no affection for any sin however small. These are the souls he addresses in the pages of this most charming book.

He tells us in his preface that he does not address heretics or supply them with any comfort. He means " wilful heretics," apostates—who abounded in the sixteenth century —those *who had been once illuminated, had tasted the heavenly gift, had been made partakers of the Holy Ghost . . . and had fallen away.*† He means those that are culpable in their heresy, who know, or ought to know, if they prayed and followed God's

* Ezech. xiii 18. † Heb. vi 4.

light, that they are out of his one Church. But he does not include those who have the misfortune, through inculpable ignorance, to hold erroneous doctrines, or are out of the visible unity of the true Church not by their own fault, and are ready to believe every truth revealed by God. As long as they are really *men of good will*, ready to do God's Will directly they see it, there is plenty of balm for their souls, and the one merciful, wise and loving Physician is ever ready to receive them.

All careful readers will recognize the wisdom of Blosius. He does not administer to our languid souls a mere stimulant, to be followed by a reaction of still more hurtful sadness, depression and discouragement. This book, though full of sweetness, is a genuine tonic of lasting effect. No soul, however thoroughly faint-hearted, could read and study it attentively without being permanently cheered and encouraged. The doctrine is not only pious, loving, sweet, but also learned, solid and founded on firm theological principles. It is thoroughly in accordance with the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, which are appealed to continually from beginning to end.

If, after tasting this comfort, the most faint-hearted soul is not filled with new vigour

in God's service, we might justly exclaim: "What *could* God say more to encourage you and to make you walk joyfully in the way of love instead of dismally in the way of fear? *And yet, after all this, ye believe not the Lord your God!*"* We should then understand what kind of wilful discouragement God means to denounce when he says: *Wo to them that are faint-hearted, who believe not God, therefore they shall not be protected by him.*†

Everyone who has had to guide good, devout, pious souls, whether in the world or in communities, will acknowledge that what ninety-nine out of every hundred—perhaps not excluding the hundredth—want above everything else is encouragement. The spiritual director has constantly to be saying: *Deal manfully! Be brave! Let thy heart take courage! Wait thou for the Lord.*‡ "Cease to look at yourself; at your own miseries, imperfections, wretched failures; your own meanness and want of noble generosity. If you stand all day contemplating a dunghill, can you be anything but depressed? Turn right round and look at our Lord, and your heart will rejoice and sadness will fly from you." *Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, ye just, and glory all ye right of heart*§—that is, *men of*

* Deut. i 32. † Ecclus. ii 15.
‡ Ps. xxvi 14. § Ps. xxxi 11.

good will. Look at him only; look at him always; look at him lovingly, so that you can truly say:

My eyes are always on the Lord :
*For he shall pluck my feet out of the snare.**

Remember those words of exquisite beauty:

Ye that fear the Lord, wait for his mercy :
And go not aside from him, lest ye fall.
Ye that fear the Lord, believe him :
And your reward shall not fail.
Ye that fear the Lord, hope in him :
And mercy shall come to you for your delight.
Ye that fear the Lord, love him :
And your hearts shall be enlightened.†

The sad effect of discouragement is to make the soul lag sorrowfully on God's holy ways, or even to lie down altogether in the dust and to embrace the earth.

The noble effect of courage is expressed in that verse of the psalm said so often by those who recite the Divine Office:

I ran in the way of thy commandments :
When thou didst enlarge my heart.‡

No one can study this treatise of the great Benedictine abbot without feeling his heart and soul enlarged. Joy enlarges the heart.

* Ps. xxiv 15. † Ecclus. ii, 7-10.
‡ Ps. cxviii 32.

Confidence puts new vigour into the spirit. The soul, despising all fatigue, regardless of all difficulties, forgetting all failures, begins to run gladly, nay triumphantly, in the way of God, doing his Will with joy and praising him.*

This book ought to have that effect. Not only should it make us run in the way of God's commandments and counsels, but it should make us advance, like the lame man in the temple, *leaping and praising God;*† and it should cause us, like king David, for very spiritual ecstasy of joy, *to dance with all our might before the Lord.*‡

Date of this Work

Abbot Blosius (Louis de Blois), who was born in October, 1506, of a noble family, became a monk in the Benedictine Abbey of Liessies, in the Low Countries, now included in France. After his profession he studied in the University of Louvain. In 1528, when twenty-two years old and not yet ordained priest, he was elected coadjutor to the abbot. He remained in Louvain to complete his education till the death of the aged Abbot Gippus, the thirty-third abbot of Liessies.

* *Cf.* Ps. lxxxv̄ 11. † Acts iii 8.
‡ 2 Kings vi 14.

This prelate, who had governed the abbey for thirty years, died in 1530, and was buried under the choir of the abbey church. Blosius, who was already coadjutor, was elected to succeed him on July 12, 1530. On November 11 of that year the young abbot-elect was ordained priest, sung his first Mass the next day, and on November 13 was solemnly blessed as the thirty-fourth abbot of the ancient abbey. He governed the community for the space of nearly thirty-six years, till his death in January, 1566, in his sixtieth year. His first spiritual book was the SPECULUM MONACHORUM, OR MIRROR FOR MONKS, an English translation of which was published at Paris in 1676. This was first published in Louvain in 1538. Then followed a number of other spiritual works, and in 1551 the BOOK OF SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTION, the English translation of which forms the first volume of this edition of his works.

In 1553 the abbot published a small work of much utility called A SHORT RULE FOR BEGINNERS IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. It contains a great deal of the teaching of his longer works in condensed form, and is small enough to be carried about as a *vade mecum*. It will appear later in this edition.

Then came, in 1555, the present work, CONSOLATIO PUSILLANIMIUM, COMFORT FOR

THE FAINT-HEARTED, which is, as the old Benedictine editors of his works justly say, "a true panacea or universal cure for all the diseases of afflicted souls and desolate consciences."

Blosius was then in his fiftieth year, and had now been abbot for twenty-five years. He was a man not only of learning and holiness but of ripe experience, by which he had come to realize that what the souls under his pastoral care most needed was to be encouraged, that they might become stable in the way of perfection. After this he published three more spiritual treatises, the last in 1562, four years before his happy departure to God.

His careful editors in 1672, after giving an account of his various writings, end by these words: "Behold, pious reader, the remarkable diligence of Ludovicus Blosius, the abbot, during the space of twenty-four years. By the suggestion and help of the Holy Spirit, he was enabled to write so many and such various works for the good of souls, although his time was much occupied in attending to important public affairs, both of Church and State, besides the government of his community and the restoration of his abbey and other business."

This translation has been made from the

edition of the collected works of Blosius published by the monks of Kempten, in South Bavaria, in 1672. It is a reprint of an edition published in 1669, which was in its turn a reproduction of the first edition of the collected works published by the Plantin Press in Antwerp in 1632.

The editors tell us that, while the divisions into chapters and the headings of the chapters are the work of Blosius himself, the analytical summaries that help the reader so much were made by the editors themselves.

When notes occur in this volume, they also are the work of the Benedictines, unless marked as written by the translator.

It will be noticed that Blosius is particularly fond of quoting two Dominican writers, Blessed Henry Suso and Doctor John Tauler, often called the "Illuminated Doctor." Both of these authors belong to the celebrated German school of spiritual writers of the fourteenth century. They, with Ruysbroeck, have always been numbered among the masters of the spiritual life.

Of the three, Ruysbroeck was the oldest, being born in 1293 and dying in 1381. He was prior of Vauvert in Belgium.

Blessed Henry Suso was born in 1300, and became a Dominican at Constance in 1313. He was a man of marvellous austerity of life

and of intense charity, both towards God and man. Blosius quotes him often, and especially his LITTLE BOOK OF ETERNAL WISDOM. He died in the Dominican Priory at Ulm, on January 25, A.D. 1365. Pope Gregory XVI beatified him, and the Order keeps his feast on March 2.

Father John Tauler was a contemporary of Blessed Henry Suso, being born at Strasbourg in the same year, 1300, and entering the Order of St Dominic in 1315. Not many details of his life are known with any certainty. During the terrible plague, about 1346, called the "black death," he attended the sick and dying with the utmost self-sacrifice. He was a preacher as well as a writer, and died in 1361, four years before Blessed Henry Suso. Tauler's doctrine has been attacked, notably by Eck, against whose misrepresentations Blosius defends him. Bossuet considered his writings to be of great value, and St John of the Cross carefully studied him. It is remarkable also that the works of Tauler were the first that St Francis de Sales directed St Jane Frances de Chantal to read.

Blosius, in his different chapters, does not always give the exact words of the authors he quotes, but the substance of their doctrine, often abridged.

3. *Nor to heretics.*

In vain also would it be for heretics to imagine that these comforting words apply to them, unless they lay aside all heretical obstinacy and humbly submit themselves to the Church Catholic.*

4. *Addressed to the earnest.*

But men of good will, to whom this book is addressed, must not fear. By men of good will we mean all who remain firm in the right faith, abstain from all deliberate sin, and are trying to live according to the spirit, in order that they may please God. Let not such men fear, I repeat, but let them rather rejoice, however imperfect and weak they may be. For of such without doubt St Paul speaks, when he says: *There is now therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh.*†

Truly, if they persevere unto the end, they will come to the light and happiness of the kingdom of heaven, where they will for ever see God face to face, where they will love and praise God perfectly, where they will be happily united to God and enjoy him for ever and ever.

* As to what kind of heretics are here meant, see Translator's Preface, page ix.

† Rom. viii 1.

CONTENTS

PAGE

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE . . . v

AUTHOR'S PREFACE xvii

CHAPTER I

OF SCRUPLES ABOUT CONFESSION . . 1

SECTION I

1. Long confessions to be avoided . 1
2. Trust in God, not in self . . 1
3. Long confessions disturb and stain the soul 1

SECTION II

How to confess venial sins . . 2

SECTION III

How to ensure purity of conscience . 3

SECTION IV

1. Confession of venial sins . . 4
2. Mortal sins, only, need be confessed . 4
3. Venial sins are blotted out in many ways 4
4. The desire of contrition . . 5

SECTION V

Anxiety after confession . . 5

SECTION VI

1. The power of absolution . . 6
2. Confidence after careful confession . 6

CONTENTS

CHAPTER II

PAGE

TEMPTATIONS TO IMPURITY, BLASPHEMY AND DESPAIR 7

1. Temptations often assail the innocent . 7
2. Despise them utterly 7
3. Against despair use the anchor of hope 8
4. Humble confidence in God . . 8

CHAPTER III

OF FIRST INDELIBERATE MOVEMENTS AND UNREASONABLE THOUGHTS 9

1. What sin really is 9
2. No involuntary thought sinful . . . 9
3. When there may be venial sin . . . 10

CHAPTER IV

IMPATIENCE IN THE TIME OF TEMPTATION AND AFTER FALLING INTO DEFECTS . . . 12

1. Inordinate impatience after sin often displeases God more than the sin itself 12
2. A threefold shield 12

CHAPTER V

THE WONDROUS MERCY OF GOD . . . 13

1. God merciful and long-suffering . 13
2. Terrible only to those who delay repentance 13

CHAPTER VI

PROTECTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY . 14

1. Our Lady should be invoked by the suffering 14

CONTENTS

PAGE

2. Imitate as well as invoke her . . 14
3. The advocate and mediatrix of the faint-hearted . . . 15

CHAPTER VII

How much can be Obtained from God by True Repentance 16

1. God forgives the greatest sins when we repent 16
2. He does not refuse grace on account of past sins 17
3. Why he allows the good to fall . 17
4. The Apostles even sinned . . 18
5. Rise quickly with loving contrition . 18
6. Four companions of true repentance . 19

CHAPTER VIII

Forms of Acts of Contrition . . 20

1. Confession of sin in general . . 20
2. Particularly of our ingratitude to the long-suffering loving-kindness of God 20
3. Acknowledgement that we deserve punishment . . . 21
4. Prayer for pardon of guilt and punishment 22
5. Taking blame to ourselves, and hope of mercy 22
6. Confusion and sorrow for having turned from God to created things . . 23

CHAPTER IX

Another Prayer for Forgiveness of Sin . 25

1. Lay down your sins in the Wounds of Christ 25

CONTENTS

PAGE

2. The life of Love . . . 25
3. Confidence of mercy through the merits of Christ's Passion . . . 26
4. The immense mercy of God . . 26

CHAPTER X

OFFERING OF THE MERITS OF CHRIST FOR OUR NEEDS 27

1. The love of God for man . . 27
2. Given us without our own merits . 27
3. Given as a compensation for all sins . 28
4. The merits of Jesus Christ offered for our needs 28

CHAPTER XI

THE WONDERFUL POWER OF CONTRITION . 30

SECTION I

1. Contrition springing from the motive of most perfect charity sometimes in a moment blots out guilt and punishment. This ought to give great comfort to timorous consciences . . 30
2. This most perfect contrition, though rare on account of our lukewarmness, is by God's grace quite possible . 31
3. This is the most precious of all treasures . . . 31

SECTION II

1. The mercy of God is so great that he accepts a small and short penance from those who, through weakness or infirmity, cannot do more . . 32

CONTENTS

PAGE

2. Sins once forgiven do not return, nor do they prevent or diminish the familiar friendship of God . . 33

SECTION III

1. The love of the most tender mother for her only child cannot be compared to the love of God for truly contrite sinners . . . 33
2. Converted sinners often love God more than innocent souls love him . 34
3. Whence they are often more pleasing to God 35

CHAPTER XII

HOW FAR FORGIVEN SIN SHOULD BE REMEMBERED 36

1. After careful confession the faint-hearted should not reflect on past sins in particular . . . 36
2. Grave sins can be instantly forgiven . 37

CHAPTER XIII

COMFORT ABOUT DISTRACTIONS IN PRAYER . 39

God bears mercifully with involuntary distractions 39

CHAPTER XIV

COMFORT IN THE STRIFE AGAINST GLUTTONY 40

It is rare not to be tempted to some excess in eating 40

CONTENTS

CHAPTER XV

PAGE

COMFORT IN THE WARFARE OF CHASTITY . 41

1. This warfare will cease in heaven . 41
2. But the war continues in this world . 41
3. That, persevering, we may be crowned in heaven 42

CHAPTER XVI

IMPERFECTIONS AND TEMPTATIONS OF GOD'S SERVANTS 43

SECTION I

Great rewards are prepared even for the imperfect in God's house, in which there are many mansions . . 43

SECTION II

1. We must always try to advance . 43
2. He who really tries to advance is safe . 44
3. No involuntary movement of passion is sinful 44
4. Holy people are often tempted, to keep them humble and compassionate . 45

SECTION III

1. God allows defects to foster humility . 45
2. Humility is safer when faults are seen . 46
3. Our faults being seen make us diligent 46

CHAPTER XVII

HUMBLE CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S MERCY . 47

SECTION I

To prepare for death, exercise yourself constantly in humble confidence . 47

CONTENTS

SECTION II

PAGE

1. Despair cannot overcome those trusting in God's mercy . . 47
2. But confidence must be accompanied by humility, love and care to avoid sin 48

SECTION III

1. The very nature of God is goodness and mercy 48
2. As his nature is everywhere present so his mercy is ready for all . . . 49
3. Humble and loving confidence is a gift of God 49

SECTION IV

1. Look not on God as a severe Judge but as a loving Father to those who truly repent 49
2. His love is like that of a tender mother 50
3. He is not overcome by our ingratitude, but invites us with long-suffering to repentance 50
4. This love demands a return of love . 51

CHAPTER XVIII

OF DRYNESS AND THE ABSENCE OF SENSIBLE DEVOTION 52

1. Dryness of spirit and darkness are not signs of God's displeasure . . 52
2. Rather signs of love 52
3. Resignation as long as they last . 52

CONTENTS

CHAPTER XIX

PAGE

EVERYONE SHOULD BE CONTENT WITH HIS OWN MEASURE OF GRACE 54

SECTION I

We should love God as much as, by his grace, we can 54

SECTION II

Good will in keeping from sin and striving after virtue joins the soul to God . 55

CHAPTER XX

NO GOOD WORK SHOULD BE OMITTED ON ACCOUNT OF INTENSE AFFLICTION OF SPIRIT 56

1. A common snare of the devil . . 56
2. How to escape it 56
3. The fiercer the assault the more firm must we remain 57

CHAPTER XXI

RESIGNATION A KIND OF MARTYRDOM . . 58

SECTION I

Trials, at first, are hard to bear, but their fruit is perfect resignation of spirit, and therefore they are allowed by God . 58

SECTION II

1. Profit from interior trials, here and hereafter 59
2. Peaceful endurance of them a kind of martyrdom 59
3. This patience a sign of God's grace . 60

CONTENTS

CHAPTER XXII

PAGE

OF SADNESS AT THE THOUGHT OF OUR IMPERFECTIONS 61

1. God often allows holy men to be ignorant of their state . . 61
2. They are absolutely determined to be faithful to God . . . 62
3. This ignorance is the cause of security in life and confidence at the hour of death 62

CHAPTER XXIII

TEMPTATIONS TO SCRUPLES ABOUT SPIRITUAL DUTIES 63

SECTION I

1. Scruples as to right intention in spiritual exercises 63
2. Causes of these scruples . . 63
3. Remedy for them . . . 64
4. Resignation under them . . 64
5. Patient resignation in these trials very meritorious . . . 65
6. Easier not to indulge in self-seeking . 65

SECTION II

The same doctrine in dialogue form . 66

SECTION III

In trials of soul seek not outward comforts 66

SECTION IV

1. Spiritual desolation a most bitter suffering 68
2. God comforts in various ways . . 68

CONTENTS

CHAPTER XXIV

PAGE

On the Causes and Fruits of Trials . 69

1. Afflictions help holiness and are allowed out of love . . . 69
2. The principal object of them is to detach the soul . . . 70
3. It is wrong to murmur at the cross . 70
4. Nothing more strongly draws us to God 72
5. Nothing more joyful than to have suffered for God . . . 72
6. No science more profitable than patience in suffering . . . 73
7. Eighteen benefits from patient suffering 73
8. We should, therefore, thank God for them 77

CHAPTER XXV

Other Comforts in Suffering . . 79

Section I

1. Look on all as coming from God's fatherly love . . . 79
2. Trials teach us patience and humility . 80

Section II

Patience in adversity is a good sign of election 80

CHAPTER XXVI

The Degree of Resignation to which even the Imperfect can Attain . . 81

1. Perfect self-denial the foundation of holiness 81
2. There are divers degrees . . 81

CONTENTS

CHAPTER XXVII

PAGE

EVEN IMPERFECT SOULS, PERSEVERING IN HUMBLE GOOD WILL, MAY ATTAIN TO A HIGH DEGREE OF UNION WITH GOD . . . 82

1. We must desire union with God . 82
2. Self-combat necessary . . 82
3. God rewards our desires if they are genuine 83

CHAPTER XXVIII

NOT ALL THE FRIENDS OF GOD AND HIS FAITHFUL SERVANTS ENJOY SPIRITUAL COMFORT . 85

1. The sweetness of contemplation not given to all 85
2. Different vocations add to the beauty of God's house 85
3. Comfort for those called to active works 85

CHAPTER XXIX

INDIGNATION AT OUR IMPERFECTIONS IS OFTEN THE EFFECT OF SELF-LOVE 87

1. We should choose a thing because it pleases, not us, but God . . . 87
2. Thus are we more quickly cleansed and adorned with grace 88

CHAPTER XXX

COMFORT ABOUT TEMPTATIONS AND FAILINGS 89

SECTION I

1. Be not cast down by seeing many defects 89

CONTENTS

PAGE

2. Grave temptations do not show us to be unmortified 89
3. A horror of suffering in the lower part of nature does not displease God . 90
4. Wonder not to see yourself imperfect . 90
5. The angels sang of peace in the gospel, not to the perfect only, but to men of good will 90

SECTION II

1. Trouble of mind after confession . 91
2. In Christ we have all 92
3. Satisfaction in and through Jesus Christ 93

CHAPTER XXXI

THE APPLICATION TO OURSELVES OF THE ACTIONS AND SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST . 94

1. On what conditions God will receive this offering 94
2. This practice should be taught the youngest children 95
3. The more actual is the union of all our actions with Christ the more fruitful will they be 95
4. Unite our imperfect endeavours with the merits and satisfaction of Christ . 98

CHAPTER XXXII

THE IMMENSE LOVE OF GOD FOR MAN . 99

1. Two kinds of love God shows to man . 99
2. What certainty we can have of God's love 100
3. Different degrees of moral certainty . 101

CONTENTS

PAGE

The love of God, that does not depend on our merits in any way, is most certain; and no created love can be compared to it . . . 102

5. Through that love God cannot will the damnation of any one unless he wilfully sins, and of sin God is not and cannot be the author . . 103

6. Man has such liberty to sin or not to sin, that even he who by the eternal judgement of God has been condemned, is freely able to be converted if he wills, and to escape the sentence of damnation. It comes from the hardness of a man's heart if he freely chooses not to be converted. . 104

7. To this freedom of man's will (which God wills to remain inviolate) join the thought of God's infinite goodness and mercy, and however timid and faint-hearted thou mayest be, holy confidence will be restored . 105

CHAPTER XXXIII

OF THE MAN REPENTING IN OLD AGE . 107

1. Comfort for those converted in old age 107
2. Whoever thinks otherwise does an injury to God's goodness . . 107
3. Teaching of our Lord . . 108
4. The love of Christ supplies all defects . 109
5. Even in purgatory there is comfort . 110
6. Who ought to fear a terrible purgatory 111
7. Who ought to have much fear . 112
8. Comfort for true penitents in Scripture 112

CONTENTS

CHAPTER XXXIV

PAGE

COMFORT FOR THE HOUR OF DEATH . . 115

SECTION I

DEATH SHOULD NOT BE TOO MUCH FEARED 115

1. Simeon teaches that the good should desire death as the time of entering into liberty . . 115
2. Also because death ends the battle with evil . . . 116
3. The only way of going to God and the society of the blessed . 116
4. Let the dying devoutly embrace the feet of Christ . . . 117

SECTION II

OF A GOOD AND HAPPY DEATH . . 118

1. At death unite yourself to the merits and sufferings of Christ . 118
2. Complete and loving resignation . 119
3. Full and pure resignation coming from true and perfect charity can free us from all guilt and punishment . . . 119
4. Support the weakness of nature at death by the thought of the sufferings of Christ . . 120
5. Also by the certain hope of resurrection through Christ . 120
6. By the examples of the saints, who died in joy magnifying the Lord 121
7. And by the hope of eternal glory . 122

CONTENTS

Section III

PAGE

More Comfort as Death draweth Nigh 125

1. Christians should rejoice to be delivered, by death, from prison, to go to their most merciful God 125
2. Nor should past sin too much trouble their peace . . 125
3. Death the end of labour and the harbour of refuge . . 127
4. Longer life may heap up debts, not reward 127
5. Welcome the will of God with joy . 127
6. The effect of this exhortation . 128

CHAPTER XXXV

The Patronage of our Lady the Comfort of the Sorrowful 129

1. Intercession of the Blessed Virgin our advocate 129
2. All need her prayers, the greatest sinners most . . . 129
3. Her prayers often save despairing sinners 130
4. Her only Son has reserved this honour for his Mother . . . 130

CHAPTER XXXVI

Entire Resignation to the Good Pleasure of God 132

1. The penitent should comfort himself humbly with the satisfaction made for his sins by Christ . . 132
2. He should resign himself lovingly to Christ suffering, prepared for any purgatory God may appoint . 132

CONTENTS

CHAPTER XXXVII

PAGE

COMFORT DRAWN FROM THE THOUGHT OF ETERNAL HAPPINESS . . . 134

1. In heaven we have numberless friends 134
2. Images of heaven from the Bible . 135
3. Society of our Lady, the angels and saints 136
4. Essential reward, the clear vision of God and union with him in glory . 137
5. Compare the glory of the saints with their sufferings here. . . 138
6. Devout aspiration of the soul after heaven 138

CHAPTER XXXVIII

WONDERFUL THINGS SPOKEN OF GOD'S MERCY 141

SECTION I

HOW IMMENSE IS THE MERCY OF GOD . 141

1. Despair denies to God his attributes of patience and truth . . 141
2. God's mercy is a greater marvel than his almighty power . 142
3. In the mercy of God there is greatness, multitude, excess and no limit 142
4. In his works, his mercy, by which he doth all for us, is more worthy of praise than his power, by which he hath wrought such wonderful things . . 144

CONTENTS

SECTION II

PAGE

THE MERCY OF GOD SHOWN BY TRIALS AND BY HIS LONG-SUFFERING . . 145

1. Adversity, being the effect of mercy, demands thanksgiving . 145
2. Those best understand God's mercy who best understand their own misery . . 147
3. God's mercy arises from his faithful love 148

SECTION III

COMFORTING WITNESS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT ABOUT GOD'S MERCY TO SINNERS 149

1. God promises to forget as well as to forgive . . . 149
2. After forgiving he crowns penitents with merits . . . 151
3. To increase our hope the holy Scripture heaps up wonderful sayings about the immense depth of God's mercies . . . 151

SECTION IV

SWEET COMFORT FROM THE GOSPEL 153

1. The whole life, teaching, miracles and sufferings of Christ show us the abundance of God's mercy . 153
2. Those who sought and obtained the mercy of Christ . . . 155
3. The tears of Christ and the joy of the angels . . . 157

CONTENTS

Section V

PAGE

The Thought of Mercy urges Men to Repent 158

1. The treasure of mercy is inexhaustible, and is distributed to those desiring to change their lives for the better, so that they can in a certain sense claim it from God by his promise . . . 158
2. The Son promises pardon to true penitents; the Father stands surety for it; the Holy Ghost, in the meantime, is bestowed as an earnest or pledge of it . . 160
3. Most dangerous to delay conversion, presuming on God's mercy. If this has been done, despair not . 161

Section VI

Examples of Mercy to Sinners . 162

1. David and Peter . . . 162
2. How devoutly David did penance 164
3. The Canaanean, the blind beggar and the penitent thief . . 165
4. The prodigal and the publican . 166
5. Cain and Judas . . . 167
6. Many of those who crucified Christ repented . . . 167
7. Despair increases sin . . 168

CONTENTS

CHAPTER XXXIX

PAGE

COMFORT ABOUT FREQUENT FALLS INTO FAULTS IN MEN OF GOOD WILL . . . 170

1. Though thy falls be many, never lose courage 170
2. The elect, though they may often fall, always rise quickly 171
3. However many our temptations, even though there may be many or even great sins, if only we repent we are not shut out from the fruit of the precious Blood 172

CHAPTER XL

JESUS CHRIST COMFORTS A SINNER WHO DESIRES TO LEAD A BETTER LIFE . . . 174

SECTION I

HOW A FAITHFUL SOUL MAY ATTAIN TO CONTRITION FOR SIN . . . 174

1. The wounds of Christ excite loving sorrow 174
2. When sorrow is genuine . . . 175
3. The devil before sin promises safety; after sin suggests discouragement 177
4. Another stratagem of the evil one . 179
5. Steps of true repentance leading to God 181

CONTENTS

Section II

PAGE

Confession and Satisfaction need Discretion 183

1. Repeating confessions to be avoided according to the advice of a skilful confessor 183
2. One of the useful effects of confession is to learn our own vileness 187
3. Satisfaction 188

Section III

Inward Renewal and Holiness . 191

1. List of holy exercises for a soul desiring God only 191
2. By entire abandonment to God, the soul should be ready to do everything pleasing to him . 194
3. Death the gate of heaven to those loving not the world but God . 195
4. Better not to know whether we shall die in God's grace, that we may trust all to him, not to ourselves 196

Divine Comfort from Holy Scripture . 199

Letter of Blosius to a Friend . . 207

Notes 213

COMFORT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED

CHAPTER I

OF SCRUPLES ABOUT CONFESSION

SECTION I

1. Long Confessions to be avoided.
2. Trust in God, not in self.
3. Long Confessions disturb and stain the soul.

*From Ruysbroeck.**

1. I EXHORT thee very earnestly to shun long and wordy confessions, for they will disturb the peace of heart and entangle thee in errors and scruples.

2. For if in confession thou dost use many unnecessary words—for instance, in accusing thyself of venial sins—and if thou triest to obtain peace of mind about these lesser faults more by thine own effort than by trusting in God, thou wilt always remain deprived of God's light, nor canst thou be taught by God.

3. From this want of light it may come to pass that thou mayest not be able to distinguish between what is serious and what is

* *Mirror of Eternal Salvation*, c. v.

trifling, what is greater sin and what less. Therefore if thou shouldst pass over anything which thou art accustomed to confess, although there is no obligation whatever to confess it, thou wilt be harassed with troubling imaginations, wilt suffer distressing anguish of mind, while all the time perhaps thou hast not confessed something much more important. For thy conscience is only agitated by fear, anxiety and self-love, instead of being enriched and guided by faith, hope and charity. This mistaken kind of confession therefore should be carefully shunned.

SECTION II

HOW TO CONFESS VENIAL SINS

THOSE small faults which are called daily and are common to all, and from which no one can be free, mention in few words. Do not occupy thy mind and trouble thy heart by thinking of these things in detail. Thou mayest confess them in a general way, proposing to thyself and determining always to live well, and desiring to avoid not only mortal sins, but all deliberate venial ones.*

* The Council of Trent, Session 14, chapter v, teaches that venial sins need not be confessed, although when wilful they are able to be absolved.

SECTION III

HOW TO ENSURE PURITY OF CONSCIENCE

THE beginning of all holiness is purity of conscience.* In order to obtain this the following means should be employed:

1. Thou shouldst explore the depths of thy heart by careful examination and self-scrutiny, to see what thou canst remember that thou hast done wrong.

2. If thou findest anything serious that thou thinkest to be a mortal sin, purify thyself from it at once by contrition, confession and satisfaction, in the presence of God, the Truth Eternal, and the priest his minister.

3. Then full of good hope, and with unwavering trust in God's mercy, thou must have an assured confidence that thy sins are forgiven.

4. But though thou mayest have obtained pardon of thy sins from God, nevertheless always remain before his mercy-seat, crying out constantly, with all the affection of thy heart: *Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.*†

* *Cf.* Prov. xxii 11. † Luke xviii 13.

SECTION IV

1. Confession of venial sins.
2. Mortal sins only need be confessed.
3. Venial sins are blotted out in many ways.
4. The desire of contrition.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. We are not able, as long as we live in this world, to be entirely free from venial faults and daily imperfections. About these, my dearly beloved, you should not allow yourselves to be anxious, nor to be disturbed if you have not confessed them in detail. Confess them humbly and carefully unto God; accuse yourselves unto him with contrite and devout hearts. In this way you will avoid great waste not only of your own time, but also of those who are appointed to hear your confessions.

2. It is better to accuse ourselves of these matters in general terms, for we are only obliged by the command of the Church and as a necessary part of the sacrament to confess mortal sins and those about which we really have reason to doubt whether they are mortal or not.

3. Venial sins may be blotted out in many ways,† for instance by saying the Lord's

* *Sermon for 11th Sunday after Trinity.*

† That is, if these pious things are done with a humble and contrite heart, and not merely as an external form.

Prayer, by genuflection, taking holy water, and other sacramentals.*

4. If sorrow and contrition appear wanting, at least be sorry that thou art not sorry, for this indeed is sorrow.† The like may be said of the desire to love. If the desire to love God be sincere, it is love.

SECTION V

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IF ANXIETY BE FELT AFTER CONFESSION

WHEN mortal sins have once been sufficiently confessed and satisfaction has been made, all should be humbly left in God's hands. In the meantime all the remorse which may arise should be patiently borne with humble resignation to the good pleasure of God, till he may please to free the soul from this trial and to comfort it by the visit of his grace.

* St Thomas, *Summa*, pars III, qu. 87, art. 3.

† It is taught by St Thomas that this is sufficient in the Sacrament of Penance. The reason is because to be "sorry that we are not sorry" implies hatred of sin. It really only means "I am sorry that I do not *feel* contrition as I should like."—EDITORS AND TRANSLATOR.

SECTION VI

1. The power of absolution.
2. Confidence after careful confession.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. We should have faith in the power and authority of those who are appointed to hear confessions, and in the words of the Lord saying to them: *Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them. Amen, I say unto you, . . . whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven.*†

2. In very truth I say unto you, beloved, when a man has once rightly confessed his sins and is still tormented by remorse for them in his conscience, he will do much better if, with trust in God and with confidence in the power of confession, he mortifies his fear and does not confess the same sins again, than if he should repeat his confession. For we ought to trust in God and in his divine promise. When a man does this, he shows that he holds God as true in what he says; believing without doubt that he will keep to what he hath promised about absolution.

* *Sermon for 6th Sunday after Trinity.*
† John xx 23, and Matt. xviii 18.

CHAPTER II

OF TEMPTATIONS TO IMPURITY, BLASPHEMY AND DESPAIR

1. Temptations often assail the innocent.
2. Despise them utterly.
3. Against despair use the anchor of hope.
4. Humble confidence in God.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. THE wicked spirit is accustomed to suggest to a good soul many, yea innumerable, foul and evil thoughts. When those who have little experience in the ways of God feel these assaults, they cry out to themselves: "What dreadful things have come into my mind! Alas! how miserable is my lot! How does it stand now between God and my soul!"

2. I earnestly beg of thee, when thou art thus afflicted, to be of good heart and to pluck up courage. However bad are the thoughts that come into the mind, take care to turn from them, for thus they will in no wise hurt thy soul. Be not therefore disturbed in mind, but turn thy heart to God. Do not look at them, beware of disputing with them, do not deign even to answer one word; only reject

* *Sermon I for 3rd Sunday after Trinity.*

them and turn thy mind from them as much as thou art able.

3. Moreover, oftentimes the devil tries to plunge a pious man into the gulf of despair, saying within him: "It is no use trying, all you do displeases God, and you are the child of everlasting perdition." When such things are suggested to a man, what is he to do? As St Peter writes, he must cast all his care on God, and fix the anchor of his soul in God with firm hope and confidence in his immense mercy.*

4. Just as they who are in danger amid the raging waves of the sea, which threaten to swallow them down, leave the ropes and oars, and seizing the anchor, cast it into the deep and by its help escape the danger of death; so let him who suffers from the pressing and wicked temptations of the devil, casting all else away, fly bravely to the anchor of hope, casting it into the deep abyss of the Godhead, that is, resting with firm and immovable hope and confidence in God.

* 1 Peter v 7.

CHAPTER III

OF FIRST INDELIBERATE MOVEMENTS AND UNREASONABLE THOUGHTS

1. What sin really is.
2. No involuntary thought sinful.
3. When there may be venial sin.

*From Blessed Henry Suso, O.P.**

1. In what does sin really consist? It is found when a man with certain and deliberate will, knowingly and willingly, without contradiction of reason, turns his soul away from God and turns himself to wickedness.

2. From this it evidently follows that even if a man had as many suggestions of evil coming into the mind as there are moments in the day, and even if these imaginations were more foul than the heart of man could conceive or his tongue express, whether these images were of God himself or of any of God's creatures, and even if the man remained thus afflicted for one or even for many years, against his will, he would not sin, if only, during all this time, his reason had a hatred, displeasure and aversion to such things. In this case he would never have consented to them with full deliberation and entire will, but rather resisted;

* *Sermon for 3rd Sunday in Advent.*

although his nature is troubled by these things, he would by no means have sinned mortally. This doctrine is entirely in accordance with holy Scripture and the tradition of holy Church, by which the Holy Ghost teaches us. In fact, nothing is more certain. Indeed, one thought of vain self-conceit (fully consented to with the will) can render a man more displeasing in the eyes of God than a thousand of these imaginations, however bad (if there is no consent of the will).*

3. But in this matter there lies hid a certain secret source of anxiety which is the most craftily laid net of the devil and the cleverest trick he can devise. It is this. Sometimes a sudden evil thought comes into the mind when a man is off his guard, and thus he feels attraction of pleasure, and, forgetting himself for a moment, he does not turn from it so quickly as he ought. Then he thinks that he has turned to it with wilful and deliberate consent, and by his own neglect has sinned mortally. God forbid that we should thus think! For it is the unanimous opinion of holy men that the reason is often taken

* This opinion about the first motions of concupiscence and the fight of the flesh against the spirit without the consent of the will in the sin is taught by St Thomas, *Summa*, I-II, ques. 80, art. 3, ad. 3^{m}. See the Council of Trent, Sess. 5.

unawares through sudden thoughts exciting pleasure in the mind, and that it requires a sufficiently long delay and length of time before the reason with mature deliberation becomes fully master of itself. Then it can either receive or reject these suggestions, and thus either commit sin or turn away from it with disgust. And when this happens, men of good will ought never to feel guilty of mortal sin if they wish to trust to the wholesome Catholic teaching.* For St Augustine says that sin is a thing so voluntary, that where a thing is not voluntary it cannot be sinful. (*De Vera Religione*, cap. 14.)

* From this we see that to call sin a " misfortune " is not only bad English but false theology. A misfortune is a thing that happens without our desire and against our will. We are passive, not active. The essential nature of sin is that it is wilful, voluntary and deliberate. Original sin is a misfortune: actual sin is a misery but not a misfortune. Could a barrister say, " Gentlemen of the Jury, the prisoner at the bar has had the *misfortune* to commit wilful murder "?—TRANSLATOR.

CHAPTER IV

IMPATIENCE IN THE TIME OF TEMPTATIONS AND AFTER FALLING INTO DEFECTS

1. Inordinate impatience after sin often displeases God more than the sin itself.
2. A threefold shield.

*From Blessed Henry Suso, O.P.**

1. OFTEN when men have sinned they allow their souls to be darkened and disturbed by a badly regulated kind of sorrow. They complain, and cry out, "Woe is me!" "It would be better if I did not exist!" "Oh, why was I born?" "Oh, if I could only die!" and other foolish exclamations, by which they often offend God more than by the sins they are lamenting.

2. He, therefore, who desires to have true and genuine contrition should take care to cultivate in his soul humility, hatred of sin, and firm confidence in God. For this reason the loving spirit of Eternal Wisdom says: *Son, in thy sickness neglect not thyself; but pray to the Lord, and he will heal thee.*† For, in good truth, what could be more silly than, because you have lost one eye, to pluck out the other?

* *Sermon for 3rd Sunday in Lent.*

† Ecclus. xxxviii 9.

CHAPTER V

ON THE WONDROUS MERCY OF GOD

1. God merciful and long-suffering.
2. Terrible only to those who delay repentance.

*From St Augustine.**

1. *THE Lord is full of compassion and mercy, long-suffering and plenteous in mercy.* To those whom he hath already pardoned he is merciful. To those who are not yet forgiven he is long-suffering, not condemning them, but waiting for them, and while waiting, exclaiming, *Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you ;*† and with exceeding great long-suffering saying: *As I live, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.*‡ What sayest thou? That thou art a sinner? Turn to the Lord, and he will be merciful to all thine iniquities. No disease is incurable when the physician is almighty.

2. Say not, however: "To-morrow I will be converted. To-morrow I will begin to please God, and all my sins will be forgiven me." This is indeed true, because God has promised to forgive thee when thou art converted, but he hath not promised to-morrow to thee if thou dost delay.

* *In* Ps. cii. † Zach. i 3. ‡ Ezec. xxxiii 11.

CHAPTER VI

THE GRACIOUS PROTECTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

1. Our Lady should be invoked by the suffering.
2. Imitate as well as invoke her.
3. The Advocate and Mediatrix of the faint-hearted.

*From St Bernard.**

1. If thou feelest thyself beginning to sink into the gulf of sadness and the slough of despair, disturbed by the greatness of thy sins, confused by the foul state of thy conscience, and full of terror at the thought of the terrible judgement to come, think of Mary. In dangers, in distresses, in doubts, think of Mary, call upon Mary. Let her not depart from thy mouth, let her not depart from thy heart.

2. And in order that thou mayest obtain the help of her prayers, do not forget the example of her life. Following her thou canst not stray; praying to her thou canst not despair; thinking of her thou canst not err. If she holds thy hand, thou canst not fall; if she protects thee, thou needest not fear; under her guidance thou wilt not become weary; if she is favourable to thee, thou wilt arrive safely.

* *Sermon II* on "Missus est."

3. What is there in Mary to frighten human weakness? In her there is nothing severe, nothing terrible. To all she is gentle; she opens her bosom of mercy to all. She judges not past merits, but listens to all, shows extreme mercy to all. She compassionates the needs of all with the widest mercy.

CHAPTER VII

HOW MUCH CAN BE OBTAINED FROM GOD BY TRUE REPENTANCE

1. God forgives the greatest sins to those repenting.
2. He does not refuse grace on account of past sins.
3. Why he allows the good to fall.
4. The apostles after repentance were friends of Christ.
5. Rise quickly with loving contrition.
6. Four companions of true repentance.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. WHEN a sinner, rising from his wickedness and turning his soul entirely away from it, determines now to serve God for ever and to live to him only, the eternal and immense goodness of God shows himself as kind to that sinner as if he had never fallen into sin. For he remits all his sins perfectly, nor will he ever impute them to him, even if their number had been as great as all men together have committed, if only he grieve from his soul purely for the glory of God, and if his iniquities displease him chiefly because he understands that they displease God. For that most fervent charity from which this sorrow proceeds consumes away the rust of all sin, provided the flame of charity be sufficiently great, and the contrition, as is becoming and

* *Instit. Spir.* xx.

necessary, proceeds from all the powers of the soul.*

2. However slight is contrition arising purely from the thought of God, it is much more pleasing to God than sorrow, however intense, arising from lower motives. To a man thus repenting from love, God is able to show all familiarity and friendship, and reveal to him his secrets as much as to any one. For if God should find a soul ready and fit, he will not so much consider what the man was before, as what his disposition now is. FOR GOD IS THE GOD OF THE PRESENT. If he finds man's will good and upright now, he receives him and draws him to himself. NOR DOES HE LOOK AT WHAT HE FORMERLY WAS, BUT AT WHAT HE IS NOW.

3. Why does God allow sin in his elect? God most mercifully and with unspeakable long-suffering bears all the contempt and injury of sin, and endures it with extreme loving-kindness for many years, in order that a man, when at last he does come to the true knowledge of his sins and of the eternal charity of God, may love him more. For from this very motive his love, gratitude, reverence and vehement drawing towards his Maker are increased, made more pure in motive and are wonderfully enkindled. These effects, indeed,

* *See* Note A at the end of the book.

not seldom arise in the soul from the knowledge of sin. Thus God bears patiently the injury and contempt of sin in his elect, in order that afterwards he may bring them to great and sublime holiness.

4. Who, we may ask, were ever dearer or more familiar friends of our Lord Jesus Christ than those vessels of his mercy, the apostles? Yet not one of them remained firm; all fell into sin, though not all to the same degree. Both in the Old and New Testament do we see instances of falls of this kind, and we find God often bearing this, even in those souls who afterwards were among his most intimate friends. Rarely indeed does it happen that even souls raised to great sanctity have been very innocent all their lives.

5. Therefore immediately thou seest that thou hast fallen into a sin, turn thyself lovingly to God with all the powers of thy soul, and entertain deep displeasure at thine own weakness. And while turning thy soul thus earnestly from all sin, mind to think more of this truth, that what thou hast done, however small it may appear, has gone against the honour and good pleasure of God, than of all the confusion, loss, punishment and disgrace thou thyself hast merited by thy sin.* Thus turn thyself to God with true love, with a

* *Cf.* Ps. xxiv 15.

firm and lasting determination never to sin again. This turning to God will join thy soul by a kind of immovable love to God, thy most faithful friend. His faithfulness is in very truth so great that he cannot desert any one, nor will he ever be able to abandon any one whatsoever who leans on him with full trust.

6. There are four conditions of true repentance:

(1) Great contempt of self and displeasure with ourselves.

(2) A true and serious determination never to sin.

(3) Turning the soul with love to God.

(4) Firm confidence arising from the thought of the most bitter Passion of Jesus Christ and of his immense charity.

CHAPTER VIII

FORMS OF ACTS OF CONTRITION

1. Confession of sin in general.
2. Particularly of our ingratitude to the long-suffering loving-kindness of God.
3. Acknowledgement that we deserve punishment.
4. Prayer for pardon of guilt and punishment.
5. Taking blame to ourselves, and hope of mercy.
6. Confusion and sorrow for having turned from God to created things.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. O FATHER Almighty, loving and merciful, I, a miserable and vile sinner, cast myself at thy feet with all the lowliness that I can, and with full trust in thine immense mercy. I confess to thee all my sins, so great and so heavy, by which up to this hour I have offended thee, my most kind Father. Alas! I have not feared to commit these abominable sins, which thy beloved Son, thy Only-Begotten, has blotted out by the torments of the cross and expiated by so much bitter suffering.

2. I acknowledge to thee, most merciful Father, my constant and black ingratitude, even up to this hour, towards thee and thy Son, for all the love, kindness, and faithfulness thou hast shown me. Now, for many years

* *Exercises on the Life and Passion of Christ*, chap. xiii.

thou hast spared me, in spite of my malice and sins, with the utmost long-suffering. Thou hast borne with me most gently, in spite of all the injury and contempt of which I have been guilty by my disobedience and bad will. With what patience hast thou waited for me to repent and do penance, in order that at last my heart might become thine! And why, O Lord, dost thou desire to possess my heart? In order to construct in it a dwelling for thyself, and to pour into it thy love. Alas, O Lord my God, how many times hast thou knocked at the door of my heart by thy holy inspirations! How often hast thou decoyed me with thy benefits, attracted me by thy consolations, and driven me to thee by trials! And still I have repulsed thee, and dared to turn my back upon thee. All this, O God, thou hast borne—oh, how kindly and gently!

3. How justly couldst thou have cast me into the depths of hell! Yet in mercy thou hast spared me. It is truly wonderful, O most sweet Father, that my heart does not break through the vehemence of my contrition when I think of these things. Hell itself is not bad enough duly to punish my malice and sins. Unworthy am I to live on the earth and to be sustained by its fruits. Wonderful is it, O Lord, that all thy creatures do not rise to

revenge the manifold contempt and injury of my iniquities against thee.

4. But now, Father most faithful, have mercy on me, I beseech thee. Turn towards me, a miserable and desolate sinner, the eyes of thy divine grace and mercy. Open to me the treasures of thy loving-kindness. Receive me into thy favour. Forgive me for having so long delayed to turn to thee. Open to me thy fatherly heart, and pour into my soul thy grace, so sustaining and comforting. I beseech thee, O Lord God, to work that speedily in me for which thou hast hitherto spared me, and for which thou hast chosen me from all eternity. Woe to me, miserable sinner that I am! I have left thee, so loving and tender a Father, who hast always loved me, laden me with benefits, treated me with faithfulness, and shown me grace. I have hitherto refused to give thee my heart, which thou didst desire to make thy temple and the dwelling-place of thy love. Instead of giving my heart to thee I have defiled it with foul stains, made it a vessel of iniquity and a den of unclean spirits.

5. I acknowledge before thee, O Lord, that I am the most wicked man in the world, but still I trust in thine immense mercy. For though my sins seem above number, thy mercies are absolutely numberless. O most loving Father, *if thou wilt, thou canst make*

*me whole.** *Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee.*† Remember, O kind Lord, that comforting word, which thou hast spoken through thy prophet, saying: *Thou hast prostituted thyself to many lovers; nevertheless return to me, saith the Lord, and I will receive thee.*‡ Indeed, Father most merciful, I put great trust in this most gracious word. With my whole heart I turn to thee, just as if this word were addressed to me only, and as if by it thou wert calling me only.

6. For I am indeed that unclean and unfaithful soul, that prodigal and useless son, who unhappily have strayed away from thee, the Father of Lights, from whom all good flows. Like a sheep that is lost, I have wandered far from thee, losing and wasting all those gifts which thy liberal goodness had bestowed upon me. I have left thee, the fountain of living water, and I have dug for myself cisterns that can hold no water,§ by seeking earthly comforts, while every temporal and passing pleasure quickly vanishes like smoke. I have left thee, the Bread of Life, and I have fed on the husks of swine, by following the desires of the senses and indulging merely animal affections. I have deserted thee, the highest, most perfect and

* Luke v 12. † Ps. xl 5.
‡ Jer. iii 1. § *Cf.* Jer. ii 13.

everlasting good, and have turned to things earthly and passing. Therefore have I become truly naked, poor, miserable and unclean; I have become rotten and as the smoke of a dunghill. But I pray thee, O Father, not to remember the contempt and the injury which thou hast received from me.

CHAPTER IX

ANOTHER PRAYER FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

1. Lay down your sins in the Wounds of Christ.
2. The Life of Love.
3. Confidence of mercy through the merits of Christ's Passion.
4. The immense mercy of God.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. O JESU most sweet, to whom can I fly, weighed down and fettered as I am by innumerable sins, save to thee who art full of mercy? Therefore I cast all my evils into the deep abyss of thy divine mercy and grace: yea, all my ingratitude, sensuality, anger, disobedience, levity, want of self-denial, and all my evil tendencies I cast into thy sacred and bleeding wounds, which for my salvation thou didst receive, and I pray thee, my God, so to wash them all away with thy precious Blood that no memory of them may remain before thee.

2. O Jesus, worthy of all love, my one comfort, behold I come to thee with true affection and with a desire to love thee fervently. Firmly am I now resolved to avoid all things which might draw me from thy love, by which

* *The Life and Passion of Christ*, chap. xxv.

I can merit to be made one with thee in affection, in will and in love.

3. Thou art all my hope, my comfort and my refuge. However much my sins disturb and cast me down, thine immense goodness and the merits of thy sacred Passion raise me up and fill me with joy. Whatever iniquity I have committed is blotted out by thy precious Blood. Whatever is wanting in me, the merits of thy sacred incarnation and sufferings abundantly supply.

4. Although my sins may be great and appear numberless, still they are small compared to thine immense mercy. I trust therefore in thine infinite mercy, which will never allow me to perish, whom thou hast created after thine own image and likeness. Nor wilt thou despise me whom thou hast willed to make thine own brother, of the same flesh and blood. Most firmly also do I hope that thou wilt not suffer me to be condemned by thee, since thou hast redeemed me with such labour and hast bought me with so dear a price.

Into thy hands I commend my spirit.
*Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth.**

* Ps. xxx 6.

CHAPTER X

THE OFFERING OF THE MERITS OF CHRIST FOR OUR NEEDS

1. The love of God for man.
2. Given us without our own merits.
3. Given as a compensation for all sins.
4. The merits of Jesus Christ offered for our needs.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. O FATHER of mercies, what is man that thou shouldst so love him as to give Jesus thy most obedient Son for vile sinners who have always offended thee and have offered in return injuries and insults? Dost thou love us more than him? That we might live, he had to die; that we might be filled with spiritual joy, he was made sorrowful even unto death; that our souls might be made clean, he shed his precious Blood.

2. What, O God, didst thou see in man to make thee choose him thus, love him so fervently and remain so faithful to him? In good truth the most precious treasure, the very highest and most exalted of all gifts, thy Fatherly Heart hath bestowed upon us for our redemption, even Jesus, thy beloved Son, thine own Word. By him hast thou revealed

* *Life of Christ*, chap. viii.

unto us thy love with which thy fatherly heart hath loved us from the beginning.

3. O most merciful Father, through the love and the suppliant prayers of thy beloved Son, pardon the waywardness of thy sinful servant. Receive the most worthy sacrifice of thine only-begotten Son, and forget all the wickedness of thy servant. Much more hath he paid thee than is my debt to thy justice. If thou didst weigh on the one side my malice and on the other side his goodness; if in one scale were placed my life and in the other the merits of his most bitter Passion, how much would his merits outweigh my sins! For what crime, however grievous it may be, would not be completely expiated by his sorrow and affliction, by his humility, obedience and unconquerable patience, and above all by his unspeakable love? No sin could be too great to be blotted out by the sweat of Blood he endured in his agony. What offence could be so heavy that it could not be outweighed by the most bitter death of Christ?

4. O heavenly Father, behold I offer to thee my Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ himself, even thine own most beloved Son, with all devotion and gratitude, in union with that love of thy fatherly Heart by which thou didst send him to take my nature and to save me from everlasting death. Behold to thee

do I offer his unspeakable anguish and sorrow which he endured for me, and which thou only canst understand, for all my sins and in place of the sorrow and contrition which I ought to have. I offer to thee his sweat of Blood to make up for the tears which I ought to but cannot shed for my sins. I offer also his prayers, so humble and inflamed with such burning love, in place of my poor tepid, lazy and negligent prayers. I offer for my sins all his labours so pleasing in thy sight; all his acts of virtue; his hard penitential life; all he did during his mortal life, and all the bitter sufferings of his Passion. I offer also for my sins and in reparation for the good I have neglected to do, in union with the actions and sufferings of Jesus Christ, all the praise of the angels and the merits of all the saints, as a worthy sacrifice for thine eternal honour and glory. I offer all this for the living and dead, for whom thou, O God, dost desire I should pray and for whom I ought to pray, that thou mayst give to all, through thy beloved Son, what thou knowest to be necessary for them, in order to serve thee faithfully in that state to which they are called by thy most loving mercy.

CHAPTER XI

THE WONDERFUL POWER OF PERFECT CONTRITION

SECTION I

1. Contrition springing from the motive of most perfect charity sometimes in a moment blots out guilt and punishment. This ought to give great comfort to timorous consciences.
2. This most perfect contrition, though rare on account of our lukewarmness, is by God's grace quite possible.
3. This is the most precious of all treasures.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. A MAN can, in a moment, by true love to God, with great detestation of sin and sincere contempt of self, purely for the glory of God, so strongly and intensely turn himself from all sin as to obtain at once pardon for all the guilt as well as the punishment of sin. So that if he should die in that state he would fly straight to God, without anything to prevent perfect union, even if he alone had committed the sins of the whole world.†

* *Instit.*, chap. i.

† See St Thomas, *Summa*, suppl., qu. 5, art. 2. See note A, at the end of this book, explaining the difference between the contrition necessary for this perfect cleansing of the soul and that necessary for

2. The reason why it often happens that only part of the punishment due to God's justice is forgiven when we are absolved from the guilt of sin is simply this:—it is because our contrition and our turning of the will from all sin, and our corresponding turning to God and our love to him by no means really come from our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind and all our strength according to God's command.*

3. For true love and true confidence in God, with perfect hatred and detestation of sin, and contempt of self, is the most precious possible treasure, by which we can gain and secure easily whatever we can desire; yea, far more than we desire.†

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a state of grace. We must pray for contrition perfect in motive and sufficiently intense in will for perfect purity.—TRANSLATOR.

* St Thomas, *Summa*, II-II, qu. 44, art. 4, 5, 6. Although it is true that this contrition is rare, on account of our lukewarmness in love, it is useful to know that it is possible, by God's grace, for everyone, and we should strive to have as great a degree of it as we can. For the more we love, the more will be forgiven, according to the words of Christ about St Mary Magdalen: "Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much."

† That is, a truly humble and contrite heart.

SECTION II

1. The mercy of God is so great that he accepts a small and short penance from those who, through weakness or infirmity, cannot do more.
2. Sins once forgiven do not return, nor do they prevent or diminish the familiar friendship of God.

1. ALTHOUGH a mother may forget her only son, yet the Lord cannot forget us. For hath he not said:

And Sion said : The Lord hath forsaken me :
And my Lord hath forgotten me.
Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb ?
*And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee.**

So exceedingly great is his mercy, that a little flax or shred of linen cast into a raging fire and instantly consumed is only a figure of how ready God is to forgive a sinner truly repenting of all his sins. Verily, between the goodness of God and a repenting sinner neither time nor any other obstacle intervenes.†

* Isa. xlix 14, 15.

† There is no need for a long time (contrition works in a moment), nor is there need of anything else except perfect charity, in order that God may most graciously join a repenting sinner to himself. St Jerome says of this: " No space is between them. Death and Life are contrary, and by penitence they are joined together."—*Epistle to Rusticus*, Ep. 122, n. 3, in Migne's edition.

2. After repentance as much friendship and fidelity exist between God and the penitent as if his sins had never been committed. So good and so unspeakably kind is the Lord that it is his will never to upbraid the repentant sinner with those sins he has once forgiven; and, that the forgiven sinner should never suffer damage or punishment for them, if only he stands firmly in a holy life.*

SECTION III

1. The love of the most tender mother for her only child cannot be compared to the love of God for truly contrite sinners.
2. Converted sinners often love God more than innocent souls love him.
3. Whence they are often more pleasing to God.

From Blessed Henry Suso.†

1. THE God of loving-kindness is such an inexhaustible Fountain of immense mercy and natural goodness, that never could the most faithful mother pull from the flames her own beloved child so eagerly and lovingly as God

* St Thomas, *Summa*, pars III, qu. 88, art. 1, asks whether forgiven sins return through subsequent sin, and answers that they do not return *simpliciter*, though they may *secundum quid*. According to this doctrine, understand what is here said by Blosius.—NOTE OF EDITORS. What is meant by this? For St Thomas's meaning see Note B, at the end of the book. † *Sermon I for 3rd Sunday of Advent.*

helps a man of contrite heart, even if, were it possible, he had committed every day, even a thousand times over, the sins of all the world.

2. What then is the reason, O most sweet God, that thou art so truly loved by so many hearts? Why do the souls of so many exceedingly exult in thee? How does it come to pass that so many minds are so full of joy in thee?

Is it on account of their innocence? By no means! It is that they see on the one side their defects and faults, which make them truly unworthy to approach thee, and on the other hand they see thee, showing thyself so generous to them, bestowing thyself on them, offering thyself to them, while all the time thou needest not our goods—this, O Lord, is what makes thee so great and sweet a treasure to their hearts.

For to thee it is as easy to forgive the debt of a thousand talents as of one; and any number of mortal sins canst thou pardon as easily as one. This favour is the most honourable to thee of all. Whence thy servants cannot give thee sufficient thanks for it, and therefore it is that their hearts soften and melt in thy praises.*

* Therefore it often comes to pass that converted sinners are more fervent in love than those who have led more innocent lives. They are more touched by the love of God who has raised them, so unworthy, from such a depth of sin.

I set the Lord always in my sight :
He is at my right hand, that I be not moved.
Therefore my heart hath been glad and my tongue hath rejoiced :
Moreover, my flesh also hath rejoiced in hope.
Thou hast made known unto me the ways of Life.
Thou shalt fill me with joy with thy countenance :
*At thy right hand are delights for evermore.**

3. Evidently from the holy Scriptures we see that these converted sinners are much more praised by thee than if they had never committed such great sins, but had lived a lukewarm life, and never burned so fervently with love for thee. For, according to the opinion of St Bernard, thou dost not so much attend to what a man was, as to what in his heart he desires now to be. And, therefore, if any one should attempt to call in question thy forgiveness of sin, even as often as there are minutes in the day, he would be trying to rob thee of great honour.

* Ps. xv.

CHAPTER XII

HOW FAR FORGIVEN SINS SHOULD BE REMEMBERED

1. After careful confession the faint-hearted should not reflect on past sins in particular.
2. Grave sins can be instantly forgiven.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. A CERTAIN friend of God was once asked what he would do if (as happens to many sinners) he had lived all the days of his life in grievous sins. He replied: "When I had done all prescribed to me by a prudent and wise confessor, and had given up my sins as I ought, I should wish never again to think of them, nor to stain my heart with the remembrance of them; but I would strive from that time to live so purely that God might utterly forget all my sins. For when we no longer either desire or commit sins, but turn ourselves utterly away from them, then God also forgets them."†

* Chap. iv of *Institutions*.

† This advice is meant to guide the faint-hearted and scrupulous, who, after having tried to make a good confession, ought to abstain from anxious remembrance of particular sins, especially of blasphemy, impurity and such like, which, once confessed, are far better forgotten, on account of the danger of despair or relapse, and also to avoid trouble

2. Yea, even if I had lived for the space of forty years in sins, and now the hour of my death had come, if I had sincerely confessed my sins, if I could with perfect love, from the depth of my heart, even for the space of only one " Hail Mary," turn myself entirely to God and betake myself to him, in order that I might turn utterly away from sin and entirely to God, then I might go from this world as a pure and innocent man. But if, on the other hand, I had committed only one sin, and I went into the next world in sorrow, contrition and grief of heart, then indeed I should die as a penitent sinner.

NOTE TO CHAPTER XII (by the Editors).—The reader must notice how many things the author requires for this true and entire turning or conversion to God coming from perfect charity in order that it may be sufficient to forgive the guilt and also all the punishment of sin.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.—The doctrine of this chapter and also of Chapter VII is most comforting, full of the sweetest and most solid consolation to faint-hearted souls. It shows them how much more profitable it is to look at God and persevere in loving acts of contrition for his sake, than to go on looking at themselves and troubling their minds about past

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of mind and depression. But this does not exclude the penitent disposition of mind and humble sorrow for past sins in general. *My sin is ever before me* (Ps. l 5). See also Ecclus. v 5.

sin as an evil to themselves. If we are constantly asking for perfect contrition, intense in the power of will, how likely is it that the God of infinite goodness may give it us, perhaps on our death-beds, an hour before we die !

Thou hast given him his heart's desire :
*And hast not withholden from him the request of his lips.**

Let it be the one desire of our heart and the one constant request of our lips.

* Ps. xx 3.

CHAPTER XIII

COMFORT ABOUT DISTRACTIONS IN PRAYER

God bears mercifully with involuntary distractions.

*From St Augustine.**

WHAT ! are we to despair of the human race and to say that all are lost, to whom some foreign and vain thought comes creeping in during prayer and interrupting the recollection of prayer ? If this is to be said, my brethren, what hope would remain I do not see. But because there is good hope for us in God, because his mercy is great, let us say to him: *Give joy to the soul of thy servant ; for unto thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul.*† And how have I lifted it up ? As far as I have been able, as much as thou hast given me strength. Sweet art thou, O Lord, and mild. Thou art mild by bearing with me. From weakness I fail; heal me, and I shall stand; strengthen me, and I shall be stable. But until thou dost this, thou dost bear with me; because thou *art sweet and mild and plenteous in mercy.*‡ Thou art not only merciful, but of much mercy to all who call on thee.

* *In Ps.* lxxxv. † Ps. lxxxv 4.
‡ Ps. cii 8.

CHAPTER XIV

COMFORT IN THE STRIFE AGAINST GLUTTONY

It is rare not to be tempted to some excesss in eating.

*From St Augustine.**

TEMPTATIONS rise against me, and every day I have to fight against the lust of food and drink. And who is there, O Lord, who is not sometimes carried a little beyond the strict bounds of necessity? Whoever this may be, he is great; let his name be magnified. I am not that man, for I am a sinful man. Yet even I, O heavenly Father, magnify thy name. And thine Only-Begotten Son, who overcame the world, numbers me among the lowliest members of his body, and makes intercession with thee for my sins.

* *Confessions*, book x, chap. xxxi.

CHAPTER XV

COMFORT IN THE WARFARE OF CHASTITY

1. This warfare will cease in heaven.
2. But the war continues in this world.
3. That, persevering, we may be crowned in heaven.

*From St Augustine.**

1. LISTEN, all ye holy ones, who are fighting with yourselves. I speak to those fighting. Those who are fighting understand; he does not understand who does not fight. A chaste man desires that no movement should arise in his lower nature against chastity. He desires peace, but he has it not. For when it has come to this that no motion against purity can arise, there will be no enemy against whom we must fight. No victory is expected there [in heaven], because there is the triumph over the enemy now overcome.

2. But now, in this life, when *the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh,*† there is continual warfare. *We do not that which we will.*‡ Wherefore? Because we desire that there should be no risings of concupiscence in our lower nature; but this happy state we are not able to bring about.

* *Sermon* 43 *on the Words of the Lord.*
† Gal. v 17. ‡ Rom. vii 15.

We may be willing or unwilling, but we have these things; willing or unwilling, they tease, they insinuate themselves, they provoke, they infest us, they will arise. They are repressed, but they are not extinguished. For *the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that we do not those things that we will.*

3. For what will you, O ye holy men, O good fighters, O strong soldiers of Christ? That there may be absolutely no evil motions of concupiscence? But this you are not able to effect. Wage the war; hope for the triumph. Do what you can, as the apostle himself says elsewhere, *Let not sin reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof.** He does not say, "Let there not be sin," but "Let not sin reign." As long as thou livest, sin† is of necessity alive in thy lower nature, but the kingdom must be taken from it. What it commands, do not.

* Rom. vi 12.

† That is, concupiscence, tendency to sin.

CHAPTER XVI

OF THE IMPERFECTIONS AND TEMPTATIONS OF GOD'S SERVANTS

SECTION I

Great rewards are prepared even for the imperfect in God's house, in which there are many mansions.

*From St Augustine.**

In thy book all are written, not only the perfect, but also the imperfect. Let not the imperfect fear, only let them advance. They must not imagine that because I say, "Let them not fear," they may therefore love their imperfection and remain in it. God forbid! they must advance as much as they are able.

SECTION II

1. We must always try to advance.
2. He who really tries to advance is safe.
3. No involuntary movement of passion is sinful.
4. Holy people are often tempted, to keep them humble and compassionate.

1. *Walk while you have the light, that the darkness overtake you not.*† To walk means to advance in spirit. He who walks not, but sits at ease, is in danger of being overtaken by the darkness of death. And who can be said to sit at ease except those who do not strive to

* *In Ps.* cxxxiii. † John xii 35.

advance? Take care of this, and if death should find you striving to advance, you will be in a place of refreshment.*

2. You will say to God, *Thine eyes did see my imperfect being*, and yet *in thy book all are written*.† Who are meant by "all"? Certainly all those in whom is found the true desire of advance. For if those who are truly desiring to advance are overtaken by death, what is wanting in them will be made perfect.‡

3. But how can I advance, you may say, if I feel envy at the advance of my brother? Provided that you are displeased at this feeling of envy, it shows that you only feel it, but consent not to it. Sometimes the feeling of some passion should be striven against, but the action is not to be condemned. Only take care not wilfully to dwell in this feeling, not *devising iniquity on your bed*;§ just as if you tried to increase an illness, to help on a plague, to persecute an innocent man by speaking against things in which he whom you envy had done well, and opposing, perverting and impeding good things he desires to accomplish. Otherwise, if only you take care

* *Cf.* Wisd. iv x. † Ps. cxxxviii 16.

‡ God is so good that he crowns the desire of those who are men of good will if death overtakes them. § Ps. xxxv 5.

to advance and to stretch forward to better things, you will not be injured by evil motions which you do not consent to, but which only show that sin dwells in you.

4. There is therefore no damnation to him who gives not his members to work iniquity, nor his tongue to detraction, nor any other part of his body to injure and hurt others in any way; but who rather is humbled because he feels these envious movements, and by confession and tears and prayer tries to cast out the vice so long inbred in his nature. Even if he should not be able to cast out the involuntary motions of passion, they will make him milder to others and more humble in his own mind. Indeed, what wise man who has learnt from the Lord to be meek and humble of heart will condemn another man? God forbid that we should think far from salvation those who imitate our Saviour.

SECTION III

1. God allows defects to foster humility.
2. Humility is safer when faults are seen.
3. Our faults being seen make us diligent.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. GOD often allows some remnants of vice to remain always, even in his dearly beloved

* *Instit.*, chap. xxxiv.

servants; often does he allow them to be prone to anger and excitement, that they may learn to know themselves and not despise others, and that his grace, which he has bestowed on them, may thus remain hidden and preserved like fire under the ashes.

2. Therefore to make them acknowledge more sincerely their own nothingness, God allows them to show certain defects, as, for instance, movements of indignation, or some rough or sharp word. On this account they grow vile in their own eyes and those of others who see or hear these things, and in this way they are plunged deeper into the gulf of their own nothingness.

3. Let not these faults alarm the servants of Christ, as long as they thus realize more their own nothingness, and know themselves better. It will be easy to heal these slight wounds, and these failures will make them more cautious for the future.

CHAPTER XVII

HUMBLE CONFIDENCE IN THE MERCY OF GOD

SECTION I

To prepare for death, exercise yourself constantly in humble confidence.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

WHILST we are still in good health, we should do well to exercise ourselves constantly in true confidence in God, in order that when, at the hour of death, this is particularly required, it may be easy through habitual practice. In our last moments, to have accustomed ourselves continually to make acts of hope and loving confidence in God will help us much and make us meet death with safety. They die in peace who have learnt to lean on God only, by frequent and continuous exercises of hope and confidence.

SECTION II

1. Despair cannot overcome those trusting in God's mercy.
2. But confidence must be accompanied by humility, love and care to avoid sin.

1. TAKE care that no depth of grief, no bitterness of anxiety, no multitude of defects, no

* *Instit.*, chap. xxxiv.

enormity of crime lead thee to despair or excessive faint-heartedness. However grievously thou mayest have sinned, the mercy of God always exceeds thine iniquities by an infinite measure. However great may be thy weakness, his loving-kindness is always ready to help thy frailty.

2. God has both the power and the will to heal thee and to give thee freedom, if thou wilt only turn thyself truly to him, and if with humility thou lovingly callest upon him and hopest in him. Oh, how wholesome for man and pleasing to God is that hope and confidence born of the love of God and holy humility, which, far from rendering a man negligent and careless to amend his life, and thus more inclined to sin, spurs him on to make valiant efforts to advance!

SECTION III

1. The very nature of God is goodness and mercy.
2. As his nature is everywhere present, so his mercy is ready for all.
3. Humble and loving confidence is a gift of God.

1. SINCE it is true that we are great sinners and very imperfect men, wherefore do we not turn ourselves, humbly indeed but with full confidence, to God, who is an inexhaustible depth of loving-kindness, whose very nature

is goodness and whose special attribute it is always to have mercy and to spare ?

2. It is altogether just and right that we should love him from the inmost centre of our souls, because he is most gracious to sinners; and although we offend him every day by thought, word and deed, yet he receives us with joy, willingly forgives us if only we fly to him and trust in him with confidence.

3. Oh, what an excellent gift of God is firm, humble and loving confidence in him ! Whoever has this when he comes to die, without doubt passes happily out of this life.

SECTION IV

1. Look not on God as a severe Judge but as a loving Father to those who truly repent.
2. His love is like that of a tender mother.
3. He is not overcome by our ingratitude, but invites us with long-suffering to repentance.
4. This love demands a return of love.

1. If only our sins displease us from our hearts, and now, with unfeigned humility, we truly desire to amend our ways and to please God, he himself desires to act with us, not as a severe judge, but as a loving and merciful Father. For what says the Holy Ghost in Psalm 129:

For with the Lord there is mercy :
And with him there is plenteous redemption.

and in the 102nd Psalm:

He hath not dealt with us according to our sins ;
Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities ;
For as the heaven is high above the earth,
*So great is his mercy towards them that fear him.**
As far as the east is from the west
So far hath he removed our iniquities from us.
As a father pitying his children
So the Lord pitieth them that fear him.†

2. In good truth no mother ever loved her only son so tenderly as he loves us. With such an intense, sweet and incomprehensible fire of love does the most kind Heart of our Saviour Jesus Christ burn, and ever has burnt, for us, that if but a slight spark of that love came into our hearts they would straightway break with the vehemence of that fire, and, our souls melting with love, we should faint away.‡

3. Behold, we ungrateful men daily offend him in many ways, and yet does he not reject us on that account, but always receives us kindly and sweetly when we humble ourselves at his feet. He cherishes us with unnumbered benefits, and although we have often driven

* *Cf.* 1 Esdras 9, 13. † *Cf.* Mal. iii 17.

‡ That this is no exaggeration is seen in the lives of the saints. See the effect of the love of God in St Dominic, St Francis, St Philip Neri, St Stanislaus Kostka, St Catherine of Siena, etc. Their hearts and their flesh exulted in God.—TRANSLATOR.

him away from us by giving consent to mortal sin, yet he has not allowed the devil to drag us, however abominable by our sins, into everlasting punishment, but has waited for us with patient long-suffering until repenting we have returned to him.

4. Verily, if we rightly considered the immense loving-kindness and mercy of God towards us, and the infinite and most faithful love he bears us, wounded deeply by that love we should desert at once all love of ourselves and other created things, and love him only. Nothing should we be able to love except our most sweet lover and redeemer Jesus Christ, who created us to his own image, and, though he is the Lord of highest Majesty, on account of the exceeding charity with which he loved us willed to take our human nature, to become our brother, to work out on the earth for thirty-three years our salvation, and at last to suffer a bitter passion for us, to shed his precious Blood and to die on the disgraceful tree of the cross. Ah, love him who has so loved us and still does love us. Even if we cannot yet love him intensely, let us love him as much as he gives us grace to love, desire always to love him more and more, earnestly asking him for what we have not yet received.

CHAPTER XVIII

OF DRYNESS AND THE ABSENCE OF SENSIBLE DEVOTION

1. Dryness of spirit and darkness are not signs of God's displeasure.
2. Rather signs of love.
3. Resignation as long as they last.

1. WHEN thou feelest within thy soul no spiritual knowledge or sensible grace and devotion, but feelest heavy, poor and cold, as if deserted and cast away by God, thou must not consider this a sign that the heavenly Spouse is displeased. And when weighed down with weariness thou fallest asleep, or art fatigued with such instability of mind that thou art in no way able to remain fixed on holy thoughts, do not imagine that this makes thee displeasing to thy loving Lord.

2. The truth is that if at that season of dryness thou servest him faithfully, if thou dost not seek vain comforts, if thou bearest this darkness, this dryness of heart patiently and humbly, and shaking off all lukewarmness thou strivest to spend the time usefully, thou wilt mightily please him.

3. While, therefore, thou art in these trying circumstances, resign thyself wholly to the good pleasure of God, and lean firmly on God

by holy confidence, saying with Job: "Although he should kill me, yet will I trust in him." At such a time all spiritual exercises are distasteful to thee, but to God highly pleasing, and they will be most fruitful to thy soul if only thou dost what thou art able.

CHAPTER XIX

THAT EVERY ONE SHOULD BE CONTENT WITH HIS OWN MEASURE OF GRACE

SECTION I

We should love God as much as, by his grace, we can.

*From St Bernard.**

I WILL love thee, O Lord, in the degree of love which thou givest me and according to the measure of thy grace. If I am not able to love thee as much as I ought, if I am not able to love thee more than I can, I shall be able to love thee more when thou shalt deign to give me more; but never shall I be able to love thee as much as thou art worthy to be loved.

Thine eyes did see my imperfect being :
But in thy book all are written.†

All, that is, who do what they can, although they cannot do what they ought.‡

* *Tract. de diligendo Deum.*
† Ps. cxxxviii 16.
‡ Ought, that is, by counsel, not by precept.

SECTION II

Good will in keeping from sin and striving after virtue joins the soul to God.

*From Tauler, O.P.**

A MAN of good will must by no means consider himself far from God, either on account of certain lesser faults, or on account of the weakness of his nature, or because he is unable to follow a very strict method of external life, or on account of the inequality (the ups and downs) which he feels in the service of God, and the practice of virtues. But what he must be most intensely earnest about is this, that he should absolutely root up all more serious vices and greater sins, to such a degree that for no possible consideration, even in a matter of life or death, would he do anything against the commandments of God. As long as he perseveres in this disposition of mind, there is no reason to think that he is very far from the Lord.

* *Instit.*, cap. ii.

CHAPTER XX

NO GOOD WORK SHOULD BE OMITTED ON ACCOUNT OF INTENSE AFFLICTION OF SPIRIT

1. A common snare of the devil.
2. How to escape it.
3. The fiercer the assault the more firm must we remain.

*From Blessed Henry Suso, O.P.**

1. It is often the case with devout persons that the more sacred is the season and the more desirous they are to turn themselves to God, the more intense is their affliction of spirit, so that they cannot say even one "Our Father" or "Hail Mary" with calmness of mind, without the whisperings of the devil to distract them. In these circumstances they are apt to fall into a kind of despair and to throw up all exercises of piety in disgust, saying to themselves, "What is the use of trying? How can prayer be any good when such foul imaginations accompany it?"†

2. But in doing this they fall into a terrible mistake, and yield entirely to the will of their enemy, whose great object is exactly this—to make them abandon their spiritual exercises. They fall into this mistake because they do

* *Sermon I for Third Sunday in Advent.*

† *Cf. Imitation of Christ,* III, vi.

not understand that their prayer amidst all these involuntary imaginations, which so deeply grieve them, prospers well, and is truly acceptable in the sight of the divine majesty. For often, as St Gregory bears witness, the human mind is so dreadfully disturbed that it knows not how to deliver itself in the darkness of its anxiety; but this very distress makes powerful intercession for the soul in the sight of God. The very bitterness of the suffering endured by the soul makes it glorious in his eyes, makes him more inclined to show mercy than other spiritual exercises would, and in a way compels him to help the soul more quickly.

3. Wherefore it is an important principle never to omit any kind of good work on account of these tiresome attacks of the devil, never to give up prayer, nor to cease going to the church, which is a thing detested by the wicked spirit and thoroughly contrary to his desire. What appears to a man in this state of trial to be wanting in his prayer is only the effect of his anxious and suffering state. In spite of this his prayer is very pleasing in the sight of God.

CHAPTER XXI

RESIGNATION IN TRIALS AND ANXIETIES HELPS THOSE IN SUFFERING AND IS A KIND OF MARTYRDOM

SECTION I

Trials at first are hard to bear, but their fruit is perfect resignation of spirit, and therefore they are allowed by God.

*From Blessed Henry Suso, O.P.**

A YOUNG horse, full of high spirit and unused to harness, will often prance and kick and try in every way to get free; but, finding it impossible, he is at last broken in and subdued, and so begins to behave quietly and acknowledge himself mastered. So also in the spiritual life, men often continue to kick against the pricks, refuse to resign themselves entirely to the will of God, ready for his sake to bear all things quietly for his love, and thus have to endure heavy trials. Yet bear them they must, until the merciful God, satisfied with their patient labour, is pleased to deliver them. He knows when the proper time for such deliverance has come. Nothing therefore can be more necessary for them than humbly to offer themselves with complete

* *Sermon I for Third Sunday of Advent.*

resignation of soul to bear these trials as long as it may please our Lord, and patiently to implore his help.

SECTION II

1. Profit from interior trials, here and hereafter.
2. Peaceful endurance of them a kind of martyrdom.
3. This patience a sign of God's grace.

1. It is well to consider how sweetly and lovingly the Eternal Wisdom disposes all things. For the very trials that seem most injurious and those very anxieties and temptations that seem to weigh down the spirit the most, the Eternal Wisdom so directs that they become most useful to the soul. These trials indeed take away a great part of a man's purgatory, and bring to those who endure them immense profit and reward.

2. Although people suffering these trials of the soul consider themselves to be guilty of many serious sins, still, before God, they are truly martyrs of high merit. There is in fact no manner of doubt that to endure this constant internal affliction and trial is a far more bitter torment than to put the head on a block and to end all by one stroke.*

* Souls who suffer these interior trials patiently and with resignation can rightly be called martyrs, though not in the strict sense of the word. They are

3. Lastly, to endure these trials well is a sign and token of a high degree of love for God. This is proved, not only by the testimony of Scripture, but by the teaching of experience, for much grace and the revelation of many heavenly secrets follow. Men who are thus afflicted ought not only to be patient, but joyful, remaining certain that, as St Paul writes, *That which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure, exceedingly, an eternal weight of glory.**

called martyrs by many fathers and spiritual writers, for instance, by St Gregory the Great, in his Thirty-fifth Homily on the Gospels, St Augustine, in his Sermon on St Lawrence (Sermo 32 de Sanctis), St Bernard, Sermon I on All Saints.

* 2 Cor. iv 17.

CHAPTER XXII

OF THE SADNESS THAT ARISES FROM THE THOUGHT OF OUR IMPERFECTIONS

1. God often allows holy men to be ignorant of their state.
2. They are absolutely determined to be faithful to God.
3. This ignorance is the cause of security in life and confidence at the hour of death.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. It often pleases the Lord to allow souls to lie as if sick, although they have received full health.† They themselves, not knowing this, think themselves sick men all the days of their lives, nor can they be persuaded that they are anything but weak and infirm. And this the Creator, at once most loving and most wise, allows as very useful for their salvation. For he clearly sees that, owing to their weakness, if they once knew for certain that they were in perfect health they would immediately take some vain satisfaction in themselves.

* *Sermon II after Oct. of Epiphany.*

† Full health means the state of grace without any mortal sins, though plenty of venial ones may be present. Venial sins are not inconsistent with charity and grace, that is with the health of the soul, even in men advanced in perfection.—See St Thomas, *Summa*, II-II, qu. 24, art. 10.

2. Owing therefore to the faithful love he bears their souls, he allows them to remain in this painful state of ignorance, fear, anxiety and humiliation, although they have in fact risen to that degree of virtue that they would not offend God for the whole world, yea, rather than knowingly sin against God they would faithfully suffer death itself.

3. What compensation, some one may ask, do they have for the pain they suffer through this ignorance? A truly valuable one—nothing less than this, that when that most desirable day has at last come on which the Lord hath determined to deliver them from this state of misery, and to take them with him into his kingdom, in that very hour in which they go hence he will deliver them from this ignorance and darkness, comforting them with exceeding great kindness. And oftentimes, even before their death, he gives them some foretaste by which they feel to their intense happiness what they will in God enjoy for ever. And so with wonderful peace of mind their souls pass away.

CHAPTER XXIII

OF THE TEMPTATION TO ANXIOUS SCRUPLES ABOUT SPIRITUAL DUTIES

SECTION I

1. Scruples as to right intention in spiritual exercises.
2. Causes of these scruples.
3. Remedy for them.
4. Resignation under them.
5. Patient resignation in these trials very meritorious.
6. Easier not to indulge in self-seeking.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. We should understand and carefully remember that a man who has a pure intention to seek God in his spiritual exercises is often overcome by the weight of anxiety that presses him to the earth. During the darkness of this trial it appears to him that he does not seek God with a pure intention, and that therefore all his labours and good works are lost. For this reason his peace of heart takes flight, and he suffers much sorrow and trouble of mind.

2. This state of darkness and discouragement comes from different causes. Sometimes from the depression of his bodily powers and nerves, or from being in a bad humour on

* *Sermon I on Pentecost.*

account of his liver; sometimes from the influence of gloomy weather; sometimes from the action of the devil, who desires through these most depressing imaginations to discourage and disturb the man of good will.

3. How are these scrupulous anxieties to be managed? They should not be too violently combated, but they should be quietly disregarded with a calm and gentle meekness, and thus they will be easily overcome. Whence those do not act rightly who try to get rid of this anxiety by impetuous violence and to cast it away by force, thus injuring and weakening their brains. These people go without discretion to doctors and to God's friends for advice and help, wishing thus to deliver themselves and escape these annoyances. By acting thus they often become more involved, for no one is able easily to draw them out of the net and to give them freedom.

4. Wherefore the best advice that can be given is that when this anxiety and tempest arise in a man, he should act as men do in tempestuous weather when rain and hail pour down. Everybody then takes refuge under a roof till the tempest is calmed and the rains have ceased to fall. So also the spiritual man, when he knows within himself and feels that he wills and desires nothing but God, when this scrupulous agitation comes upon

him should quietly and cunningly take flight until internal peace is restored. At the same time, with true resignation of will and patiently taking his mind from the subject, he should try to bear the trial with a humble spirit. With a calm mind and loving soul he should wait for God in this afflicting state; and this, even if he should have to bear this trial for a week or a month, six months, a year, or even a longer time.

5. And who can tell when or in what way the merciful God may come to him and pour in his gracious gifts? Let him take care therefore to remain with a meek and gentle spirit under the protecting roof of the will of God and his good pleasure, certain that thus he will be a hundred times more pleasing to God than if he were to overflow with great sensible devotion. Thus he will offer every day many acts of virtue to God, within his soul all will flourish and grow strong and will shine with divine light.

6. For in the midst of this anxiety it is not so easy to seek one's own satisfaction and to cling to self, as in the midst of the delights of sensible comfort and the sweets of devotion. In this state natural self-love often mixes itself up, and the soul, while delighting in it without restraint, often contracts a stain.

SECTION II

The same doctrine in the shape of a short dialogue.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

MANY, when afflicted by some trial, are accustomed thus to address me: "O Father, things go badly with me! I am disturbed with divers afflictions and much grief of mind." And I reply that all is well with them. Then they: "Not so, Father; for this comes from my own fault." To which I again answer: "Whether it comes from your own fault or not, believe that this cross and affliction is placed upon you by God; and, thanking him for it, resign yourself to it and bear it patiently." To this they reply: "But I pine away with greater interior dryness and darkness." I answer: "Beloved son, bear this patiently, and you will be in a better state than if you were to enjoy many and great feelings of devotion."

SECTION III

In trials of soul seek not outward comforts.

From John Tauler, O.P.†

IN that most grievous internal affliction and dark trial of desolation, all the anxieties,

* *Sermon I on Epiphany.*

† *Sermon II on Fifth Sunday after Trinity.*

miseries and sorrows that a man may already have overcome and mastered seem to rise up again to attack him. They again assail him; with all their fury they shake the ship of his soul, and the waves swell and rage. But I beg of thee, whoever thou mayest be, thus afflicted, not to allow thyself to be cast down by fear. As long as the bark is properly provided with an anchor,* the winds and the billows cannot hurt it. Let the words of Job come to thy mind: "After darkness I hope for light." Only remain quietly recollected; wander not abroad. Bear these temptations and this bitter trial to the end; seek no external comfort to allay thy suffering,† as many do, who, when they experience this internal poverty and distress, seek something‡ that they think may lessen their suffering: this greatly hinders their spiritual progress.

* Hope in God is the anchor.

† Nothing except God, and spiritual remedies prescribed by God and spiritual masters.

‡ Something carnal or of this world. This is a fraud of the devil, who lies in wait to deceive pious souls, and desires to draw us away from God to seek outward comfort.

SECTION IV

1. Spiritual desolation a most bitter suffering.
2. God comforts in various ways.

1. The sufferings endured by chosen men are not always like ordinary sufferings. Frequently they have to endure extraordinary and unheard-of sufferings, which God allows suddenly to come upon them. These trials are like nothing they had ever experienced before or could ever have imagined.

2. Still, however bitter are these things, O suffering soul, be of good heart, and keep thy soul in peace. For in the midst of thy bitterest trials, Christ, the elect of thy heart, chosen out of thousands, the doors being shut, —that is, all the powers of thy soul being as it were shut in by thy trials—Christ himself, I say, knows how to enter and to pour into thy spirit a certain new sweetness which thou hast never yet tasted. The bitterness which now thou feelest suffer patiently instead of hell and purgatory. Verily a purified, resigned and patient soul, flying from the body, detached and perfectly cleansed, is taken up at once into the mansions of heaven, where a thousand years are shorter than one day.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE CAUSES AND FRUITS OF TRIALS

1. Afflictions help holiness and are allowed out of love.
2. The principal object of them is to detach the soul.
3. It is wrong to murmur at the cross.
4. Nothing more strongly draws us to God.
5. Nothing more joyful than to have suffered for God.
6. No science more profitable than patience in suffering.
7. Eighteen benefits from patient suffering.
8. We should, therefore, thank God for them.

*From Blessed Henry Suso, O.P.**

1. *Eternal Wisdom.* Those act not wisely who, when some affliction overtakes them, bear it grudgingly and with a murmuring spirit. My chastisement is altogether fatherly, and my rod is used with the greatest love and is truly sweet and kind. He, therefore, from whom it is never withdrawn, may be rightly considered truly happy. Affliction, I repeat, comes not from any kind of hardness or undue severity on my part, but it is the effect of the tenderest loving-kindness. This I desire to say of every kind of cross and tribulation, whether accepted willingly or unwillingly incurred, as when a man makes a virtue of

* *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom.*

necessity in not wishing to be exempt from suffering without my will, and ordering it with loving patience and humility to my everlasting praise. The more prompt and loving is the reception of the cross, the more noble in itself and the more acceptable to me does it become. Therefore listen to me while I speak further about crosses of this kind. Write deeply on thine inmost heart what I say, and let it be constantly before the eyes of thy soul as a sign or standard.

2. Lay to heart this principle: I live in a pure soul as in a paradise of delights, and therefore I cannot bear that soul to rest with love and free choice on anything else or to cleave to it. By nature the soul is inclined to indulge in hurtful pleasures.* I therefore strew thorns on the way, and I scatter trials on the path of the soul, whether it will or no, lest the soul should escape from my hands. Wherever the soul goes I sow afflictions, lest the heart may take pleasure in anything except only in me. Believe me, if all hearts were made one they could not, in this life, bear the least reward which I shall give in eternity, even for the very least little cross which any one suffereth for the love of me.

3. *The Servant.* It may well be, Lord, that afflictions are most wholesome if only

* *Cf.* 1 Pet. ii 11.

they are not too great, if they are not too dreadful and unexampled. But, O Lord God, who alone knowest all hidden things and who hast created all things in number, weight and measure, thou thyself dost see that my sufferings now are without measure and entirely beyond my strength. Indeed I know not whether there is any one in all the wide world who has constantly such painful sufferings to sustain as I. How am I to endure them? Lord, if thou wouldst be pleased to send me ordinary sufferings I could bear them, but I cannot see how I can possibly endure such extraordinary trials as mine, sufferings that in so hidden a manner oppress my heart and soul, and which only thou canst thoroughly understand.

Eternal Wisdom. Every sick man imagines that his own sickness is the worst, and every man suffering from thirst that no one is more miserable than he. Had I allowed other sufferings to afflict thee, thou wouldst have said the same. Therefore, be of good heart, pluck up courage, allow me to do as I will, and resign thyself to me, whatever may be the trial I allow to afflict thee, making no exception whatever. Knowest thou not that I only will a thing as best for thee, much more seeking thy good than thou couldst thyself? And remember that I am the Eternal Wisdom,

and therefore am the only One who perfectly knows what is really best for thee.

4. From thy own experience surely thou hast learnt that the crosses sent by me, if a man knows how to use them aright, come more home, penetrate more deeply, and more quickly urge a man to give himself to God and force him into God than any chosen by his own will. Why then dost thou still complain? Oughtest thou not rather to say, "Do with me, merciful Father, do with me whatever thou wilt"?

5. *The Servant.* It is easy to say these words, Lord, but when the affliction comes, it is so difficult to endure the pain.

Eternal Wisdom. If the cross were not painful, it could not be called a cross. As there is nothing more painful than to bear the cross, so there is nothing more pleasant and desirable than to have carried the cross. The cross gives a short pain, but a long joy. The cross is indeed most painful to him to whom the cross is burdensome and hateful, but to him who carries it cheerfully the cross becomes no suffering. Be certain of this: if thou wert to abound always in spiritual sweetness and divine comfort and delight, so as at all times to overflow with this heavenly dew, from all this of itself not so much merit would be gained, nor so much grace would

be given, nor should I become so much thy debtor, as I should by one cross or affliction borne with love, or by the painful distress of dryness of soul endured lovingly. It is easier for ten to be overturned and to fall away in the midst of delights and in sweetness of heart, than for one to be ruined while enduring continual adversity and suffering.

6. If thou hadst the science of all the astronomers; if thou couldst speak and discourse about God as fully and well as all angels and men; if thou alone wert as learned as the whole body of doctors; all this would not bestow on thee so much holiness of life as if in the afflictions that come upon thee thou art able to be resigned to me and to abandon thyself to me. The former is common to bad and good, but the latter belongs to my elect alone. Oh, if any one were able rightly to weigh time and eternity, he would indeed choose rather to lie a hundred years in a fiery furnace than to lose the reward in heaven of even one little suffering; for this hath an end, but the other hath no end.

7. *The Servant.* Truly, most merciful Jesus, thy words comfort an afflicted mind like the chords of a sweet-sounding harp. Verily, Lord, if thou wouldst but cheer me thus with sweet words while I am suffering, I should then delight in suffering, and would

prefer to endure afflictions rather than to be without them.

Eternal Wisdom. Now, therefore, listen to the sweet melody and the music of the distended strings of this harp, how richly they sound, how sweetly they vibrate.

(1) Affliction is a reproach in the eyes of the world, but in my sight an immense dignity.

(2) Suffering extinguishes my wrath, brings my grace and friendship, makes a man pleasing to me and worthy of my love, because it conforms his soul to me and makes him like me.

(3) Affliction is a hidden good, for the loss of which nothing can make up; if a man begged on his knees a hundred years for a friendly cross he could not merit it. Suffering makes an earthly man to become heavenly.

(4) Suffering detaches a man from this world and brings to him my eternal friendship. It diminishes friends, but increases grace.

(5) Suffering is the safest and shortest way. Believe me, if any one really understood the benefit of the cross, without doubt he would receive it from the hands of God as a most excellent gift.

(6) Many there are who were walking on the road to everlasting damnation and were

asleep in mortal sin, when suffering came to restore them to life and to wake them up to a better life.

(7) How many souls there are who are like wild beasts or birds, who would depart from me if it were not that constant sufferings shut them up and keep them safe, as if in a cage !

(8) Suffering preserves many from serious ruin. It enables a man to know himself, makes him dwell within himself, prevents him from roaming abroad, and teaches him to sympathise with the sufferings of others.

(9) Suffering preserves humility and teaches patience; it safeguards chastity, and brings the crown of everlasting happiness. Scarcely any one could be found who would not derive advantage from affliction and the fire of tribulation, whether he be still in a state of sin, or has begun a better life, or is fast progressing in virtue, or is already in a perfect state. It purifies the soul, as fire purifies iron or gold and adorns wrought jewels.

(10) Suffering takes away the burden of sin, lessens the pains of purgatory, casts out temptations, puts vices to flight, renews the spirit, gives true confidence, cleanses the conscience and renders the soul steadfast and superior to this world.

(11) Suffering is a wholesome draught and

a herb that is more health-giving than all the herbs of paradise.

(12) The body, which will soon go to corruption, it chastises, and the soul, much more noble and destined to live for ever, it refreshes. Behold the noble soul flourishes by suffering even as the lovely rose by the fresh dews of May.

(13) Suffering makes a soul wise and gives a man experience. What does a man know who has not gone through a course of temptations and afflictions? Suffering is affection's rod, a fatherly chastisement for my chosen ones. Suffering draws a man, nay, actually drives him to God whether he will or no. Whoever has learnt how to rejoice in suffering is served and helped on by all things, joyful or sorrowful, enemies or friends. How often hast thou put thine enemies to flight and rendered them powerless by praising me with ready and joyful mind, remaining quiet and cheerful in the time of suffering!

(14) Verily rather would I create suffering out of nothing than leave my friends without their cross. For by suffering all virtues are strengthened, a man's soul is made comely, his neighbour's edified and God glorified.

(15) Patience in adversity is a living sacrifice, and a sweet odour like precious balm in the sight of my divine Majesty, and makes the

whole host of heaven full of wonder. Never was a brave knight in a tournament gazed at with such admiration as a man who suffers in a good spirit is gazed at by all the multitude of the blessed.

(16) To keep patience in time of suffering is more admirable than to raise the dead and to do other miracles.

(17) The way of the cross is the narrow way which leads direct to heaven's gate. It makes a man a companion of the martyrs, it carries honour with it, and ensures victory over every foe. Suffering clothes the soul in red and purple garments, it weaves for the soul crowns and garlands of roses, it gives a sceptre of green palms.

(18) Suffering may be likened to a necklace of precious stones adorning a maiden's breast. Thus adorned, the soul in life everlasting will sing a new song of surpassing sweetness that even the angels cannot sing, because they never knew suffering.

The world indeed calls men that suffer miserable, but I declare them happy, because I have chosen them for myself.

8. *The Servant.* From all this how plainly does it appear that thou art the Eternal Wisdom, who canst make truth to shine out so brightly that no doubt or hesitation can remain! No wonder that a man can bear

the cross when thou hast so clearly shown the benefit of it. Verily, Lord, thy sweet words have wrought this change in me, that from this time every cross and trial will not only be more bearable, but will actually bring me joy. O Lord God, most kind Father, behold I bend my knees before thee, and from my heart I thank thee for my present sufferings and for all those that are past, however bitter and trying, which I felt to be so severe because they seemed to be injurious and hostile to my soul.

Eternal Wisdom. And now what thinkest thou of them?

The Servant. Verily, Lord, now I am persuaded that if only I look at thee, the delight of the eyes of my heart, with love, those crosses so bitter and heavy with which thou hast tried and exercised me with fatherly kindness, and at the very sight of which my friends were terrified, were like the gentle dew in May.

CHAPTER XXV

OTHER COMFORTS IN SUFFERING

SECTION I

1. Look on all as coming from God's fatherly love.
2. Trials teach us patience and humility.

1. If, by the permission of God, such darkness, interior dryness, hardness and want of stability should be experienced in the soul as to make it appear as if God had entirely abandoned thee; if such anguish presses down thy soul, that it seems like hell itself; if continual and troublesome temptations vex thy soul, and vices that seemed dead arise again and attack thee with violence; if not only wicked men but the good and those that appear faithful friends persecute thee, speak against thee with hurtful and disgraceful language and do various things to injure thee; if thou hast to bear the loss of property and to be afflicted like Job with ulcers and strange diseases; if extreme poverty equal to that of Lazarus were to overtake thee; if any other suffering of any kind and from any source were to come upon thee; take all from the loving hand of God, who allows thee to be tried and disciplined for the good of thy soul.

2. With a heart humbled and resigned bear all these things for the honour of God, as long as he may will, for sufferings wonderfully purify and adorn thy soul. And if sometimes in suffering thou art not always quite resigned, do not on that account abandon the hope of salvation, thinking thou hast lost God's grace. See only that thou dost not kick with obstinate impatience against God, and be not rebellious in will. If only thou dost try, according to thy best endeavours, to remain humble and patient, thou wilt be most dear to God and wilt come at last to the happiness of the heavenly kingdom.

SECTION II

Patience in adversity is a good sign of election.

St Gertrude says that as a ring is the sign of betrothal, so adversity, whether bodily or spiritual, which is borne patiently for God's sake, is the truest sign of divine election and a kind of betrothal of the soul with God.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DEGREE OF RESIGNATION TO WHICH EVEN THE IMPERFECT CAN ATTAIN

1. Perfect self-denial the foundation of holiness.
2. There are divers degrees.

From Blessed Henry Suso, O.P.

1. THE foundation of our salvation is this: to mortify, to deny, to resign, to lose and to annihilate ourselves. If thou dost desire to become what thou art not, thou must perforce cease first to be what thou art. But hold this as a certain fact, that no one must flatter himself that he is truly resigned, until there is no drop of his blood and no particle of the marrow of his bones that has not been tried by the fire of suffering and consumed by genuine resignation.

2. I beseech thee, beloved, be not disturbed at this. Thou canst walk along the way to heaven, even if thou dost not attain to the highest perfection. In the heavenly country both little and great are found. Do what in thee lies; persevere in thy good determination and thy holy exercises. For in this way, though we may not scale the very highest peak of the mountain, we shall still be found on the way of eternal salvation.

CHAPTER XXVII

EVEN IMPERFECT SOULS, PERSEVERING IN HUMBLE GOOD WILL, ATTAIN TO A HIGH DEGREE OF UNION WITH GOD

1. We must desire union with God.
2. Self-combat necessary.
3. God rewards our desires if they are genuine.

1. WITH our whole mind and with all possible love must we stretch forward to this goal, that we may be united to God, and may merit to become clear spiritual mirrors.* Then shall we be able to abide and to live in the Three Persons of the one divine Essence, so that we may be able to say confidently with the apostle, " Our conversation is in heaven," that is, in the three Persons of the Godhead.

2. This perfection every one ought to strive to reach with his whole desire, with all his senses and with his whole strength. If perhaps in this life he is in no way able to arrive at it, he must be of good heart, for it will be given to him by God while he is drawing his last breath in death. And even if he does not then become perfect, and departing hence is still stained with some faults, he will be brought to purgatory to

* Mirrors reflecting only his will.

be cleansed, and at last to the heavenly mansions. There will he remain in everlasting joy, greater or less, according to the greater or less degree of love to which he had attained in this life, and according to the greater or less earnestness of his desire for union while still on earth.

3. Therefore it is right that every one should try to draw with a strong hand the bow of good desire, that no moment may pass by in which he does not gain God more perfectly. For God will reward for ever the true desires of his soul, even if what he desires he should never obtain in this life. All his careless and lukewarm life God will judge in the light of the highest desire to which he ever attained in his life in this world.*

* A note of the Benedictine Editors says: "This is a great consolation for the imperfect who are men of good will."

The Latin words are somewhat obscure: *Omnem tepidam et negligentem conversationem et vitam illius, juxta supremum illud judicabit, ad quod unquam pervenit in vita sua.* Evidently "the tepid and negligent life" is not wilful, but the result of weakness, and accompanied with true and genuine, not a mere imperfect, wish to do better. Wilful tepidity and negligence imply the absence of these desires. I have translated *juxta* by the phrase, "in the light of his high, or highest, desire." The judgement of God will be modified or softened by the genuine desire of better things. Two men's lives might in certain

Although a man may feel that he hath not arrived at any high degree of union with God, he must not be downhearted, but as far as he can, using all his powers, he must strive to advance. If even thus he is still unable to arrive at perfection, he must at least take care to love it and sigh after it with all his strength.

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outward ways be equally imperfect; but one might be always content with his faults, and even rejoice in them, and not desire to amend, while the other may be constantly striving and desiring to do better and yet fail. His imperfections would evidently be judged much more leniently "in the ligh of this good desires" as long as they were genuine.—TRANSLATOR.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NOT ALL THE FRIENDS OF GOD AND HIS FAITHFUL SERVANTS ENJOY SPIRITUAL COMFORT

1. The sweetness of contemplation not given to all.
2. Different vocations add to the beauty of God's house.
3. Comfort for those called to active works.

1. THE Lord Jesus, the King of kings, does not call or even allow every one to sit down with him at his table [by the gift of contemplation] during their life in this exile; I mean that not all are intended fully to attain to the enjoyment and quiet of holy contemplation; he calls many to be only servants to stand at his table and wait by active works.

2. He does not will, I repeat, to have only delicate maidens adorned in his honour in his great house, which is the Church, but he appoints also princes, dukes, soldiers and other servants fit for divers works, that he may employ them in different ways. For not only is God pleased with those who are engaged in the delightful exercises of high contemplation, but also with those who are occupied in useful external works which they undertake purely for his love.

3. But after this exile has ended, all who belong to Christ will sit down to the solemn

banquet of life eternal. Those, therefore, must not be faint-hearted who, although they attend diligently to self-denial, do not receive here below the grace of perfect contemplation; but serving the Lord faithfully and with perseverance let them love that grace in others to whom God graciously concedes it in this life.

CHAPTER XXIX

INDIGNATION AT OUR IMPERFECTIONS IS OFTEN THE EFFECT OF SELF-LOVE

1. We should choose a thing, because it pleases not us but God.
2. Thus are we more quickly cleansed and adorned with grace.

*From John Tauler, O.P.**

1. If it were left to a man's option whether he would be delivered and freed entirely from all imperfections,† enriched with all virtues and brought at once to perfection or not, he ought to say to God: "I do not ask this gift for my sake, nor do I desire this grace to satisfy my will, but whatever pleaseth thee that I willingly accept. If, in thy sight, it seemeth better

* *Sermon II* for the Ascension.

† Sins that deprive the soul of God's grace are not included, nor the virtues necessary for salvation. To be cleansed from these sins and to have these virtues must be God's will for all. What is meant is being freed by special grace from the temptations and habitual inclinations that remain after the pardon of the guilt of sin; and of certain gifts of "grace gratuitously given," which in mystical theology are called "the gifts of God," and may be present or absent in the soul without the loss of sanctifying grace and with true resignation either to have them or to be without them.

that I should not have these favours, I would rather be without them in order to do thy will."

2. The truth is that whilst in this way we choose to be without certain graces and to be thus disappointed in our desires, we really receive more and possess more than if, to gratify our own will, we were to have a high degree of divine union or possess any created good.* Much more useful is it for us humbly and willingly to wish to be deprived of all God's gifts,† in the spirit of true resignation and self-denial, than to have them through our own self-will.

* This saying of Tauler must not be understood as implying or recommending any kind of indolence or sloth in freeing the soul of vices or in cultivating virtue, as if these things came only by the action of God without effort on our part. It is necessary for everyone to do his best, and then say to God, "Lord, as thou willest so do I will," after the example of St Paul, who fought by prayer and self-denial, and at length was instructed about resignation by hearing the words, *My grace is sufficient for thee*, 2 Cor. xii.

† That is, the gifts called "gratis datae," namely, those graces that are mere favours, and that are not in any way necessary for salvation: the ornaments of the soul. This does not apply to the grace making us holy, the abiding and sanctifying grace of God. We must never try to be resigned to the loss of that grace. Such false resignation could only please the devil.—TRANSLATOR.

CHAPTER XXX

COMFORT IN THAT FAINT-HEARTEDNESS WHICH COMES FROM THE MULTITUDE OF TEMPTATIONS AND FAILINGS

SECTION I

1. Be not cast down by seeing many defects.
2. Grave temptations do not show us to be unmortified.
3. A horror of suffering in the lower part of nature does not displease God.
4. Wonder not to see yourself imperfect.
5. The angels sang of peace in the gospel, not to the perfect only, but to men of good will.

From Florentius, the Carthusian.

1. WHY is thy heart troubled, O man of good will; why is thy heart troubled and thy mind cast down, because in this exile thou canst not practise virtue perfectly, according to thy desire and without any defect or hindrance, but on the contrary, fallest always, every day, unwillingly and against thy own desire, into imperfections?

2. In good truth, even holy and perfect men are liable in this life to temptations and sundry imperfections. Although they commit some venial sins, although they are tempted and attacked by the enemy of man and their own corrupt nature, either to impurity, vainglory

or other vices against their own will, still God does not condemn them as unmortified, and as far from true holiness and perfections, since these things displease them and are against the consent of their reason and entirely contrary to their will.

3. In like manner, whilst, as is only natural, according to feeling and the first movements, they shrink with horror from certain things that bring suffering to soul or body, in this life or in eternity, not for that are they looked on by God as unholy, if only in the higher part of the soul, in their reason, they grieve over this and join themselves and conform their wills to the will of God.

4. Since, therefore, even holy men cannot in this miserable life be free from imperfections, what wonder is it if thou fallest against thy will into many defects? Thou must say then with St Paul: *To will is present to me, but to perform that which is good I find not.** That is, my desire and will is to live perfectly in all virtue, grace and holiness, yet I cannot in fact live so perfect a life as I fain would.

5. Not only to the perfect, forsooth, but to thee and to all men of good will did the angels announce peace at the birth of Christ, singing, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.* The angels of truth did

* Rom. vii 18.

not say, "Peace to holy and perfect men" (though this is most true); but this did they emphatically sing, *Peace to men of good will.* For rational souls, endowed with good will and living in holy charity, even though they still have many imperfections, are nevertheless dear children and spouses of the eternal King. But perfect and heroic souls are queens, and are espoused by a more excellent degree of spiritual union. The Lord deigns to fly with these latter who soar aloft to the highest things, but still does not disdain to walk and run with the less perfect, who cannot fly. Never will he abandon them.

SECTION II

1. Trouble of mind after confession.
2. In Christ we have all.
3. Satisfaction in and through Jesus Christ.

1. IN God's name, O man of good will, according to the message of peace announced to thee by the holy angels, be well content and untroubled in soul. Take comfort in this great truth, that the heavenly Father has not only willed that his Son, Jesus Christ, God and Man, should be born for thee, but also has so entirely delivered him over to thee for thy spiritual advantage and use, that though every good thing is wanting to thee, and thou

canst not have it of thyself, thou yet hast all from and in the Lord Jesus. And doubt not that the heavenly Father and his well-beloved Son receive what thou dost offer as if thou didst possess all as thine own. Whatever thou hast not in thyself or of thyself, that thou hast in Christ.

2. In very truth, Jesus Christ has been given to us imperfect men, who are subject to so many faults and failings. He has done whatsoever is necessary for our salvation.*

* St Paul teaches us this: *Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption* (1 Cor. i 30). On this St Thomas says: " St Paul here shows how God supplies all defects through Christ. (1) The defect of wisdom. Christ is made to us, preachers of the faith, and through us, to all the faithful, wisdom; because, by cleaving to him who is the Wisdom of God, and participating in him by grace, we are made wise, and this by God, who gave us Christ and drew us to Christ (John vi 44). (2) The defect of power. We are without justice or righteousness of ourselves, but Christ is our justice, inasmuch as through faith in him we are justified (Rom. iii 22). (3) Of ourselves we have no true nobility. This defect is remedied in Christ; and so St Paul adds, he is our sanctification and redemption. We are sanctified, made holy, through Christ, inasmuch as through him we are joined to God, which union gives us true nobility (1 Kings ii 30). Christ is made our redemption, inasmuch as through him we are redeemed from the slavery of sin, in which true disgrace is

In him we have every good thing, all virtues, all holiness and perfection, that is all that God requires of us; and whatever it is right we should do for him and offer to him, so that from Jesus Christ, in him and through him, we can fill up, amend and perfect, in the highest and most excellent way, all those things which otherwise, in our weak and imperfect state, with such tendency to evil, would have been quite impossible to us.

3. If, therefore, thou art a man of good will, that is, if according to the will of God, thou dost really wish to please the Lord thy God by the practice of all virtues and by all holiness and perfection, thou art able in Christ and through Christ to fill up and make perfect all righteousness, perfection and holiness. Of this thou must entertain not the slightest doubt. Offer therefore with devout mind to God the Father his most beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ. For all the time lost in thy childhood and youth, offer the most holy childhood and youth of our Lord Jesus Christ. For all thy negligences and imperfections offer his most perfect life, and his most saving passion.

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found." Christ is the meritorious, satisfactory, efficient and exemplary cause of our salvation, of our holiness and of all our good.—TRANSLATOR.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE PRACTICE OF APPLYING TO OURSELVES AND TAKING AS OUR OWN THE ACTIONS AND SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR

1. On what conditions God will receive this offering.
2. This practice should be taught the youngest children.
3. The more actual is the union of all our actions with Christ the more fruitful will they be.
4. Unite our imperfect endeavours with the merits and satisfaction of Christ.

*From Florentius, the Carthusian.**

1. In order that God Almighty may receive all virtues, all holiness and perfection, and all good works of Christ, just as if thou hadst done and performed all these things thyself, what should be done? This is necessary and enough, that thou shouldst strive to turn, direct and raise thy heart, will and the whole devotion of thy soul to God. At the same time it is necessary to resign, offer and unite to his gracious will thy whole self and whatever in time or eternity God wills to permit concerning thee. For in this way thou wilt be one with him, and in thy God himself thou wilt have the fulness of virtue, holiness and perfection, and thou wilt supply by the merits

* *Instit. Christ.*, IV, lviii.

of the life and passion of Jesus Christ whatever good may be wanting to thee either in the past in which so much time has been woefully lost, or in what remains of thy life.*

2. Right and just would it have been indeed that thou, in the very first instant of reason, shouldst have directed and referred to God all thine actions and omissions, thy whole body and soul, with all their movements and works, thy sense also and reason, as would have been most pleasing to God. But because thou didst not do this in the first moment of the use of reason, or didst not do it with due perfection and earnestness, at least now strive to do so in some such way as this:

3. O most sweet Lord, my God, I acknowledge that I owe to thee service the most perfect; all faithfulness, love, self-denial, resignation, holiness, all virtues and good

* No one should abuse this comforting doctrine to encourage sloth by being content to say, "Christ has done all, I need do nothing." This would be to turn bread into poison. In order that God may receive the actions and sufferings of Christ as ours, it is necessary that the soul should work to its best ability, helped by grace, through desire, in faith and charity. Not idle but true and active desires are necessary to appropriate the merits of Christ.—TRANSLATOR.

works, and the highest perfection of soul and body. But

Thine eyes did see my imperfect being.
*And in thy book all shall be written.**

And

Lord, all my desire is before thee,
And my groaning is not hidden from thee.†

Since, therefore, O loving Jesu, I am so weak, feeble, negligent, corrupt and inclined to evil, that, contrary to my will and endeavour, I am hindered in so many ways from being able to do these things as purely and perfectly, really and actually as I truly desire to do, I beseech thee through all thy mercies to receive this my will and desire, as thou didst receive the will of St Paul, and of thine other friends. Thee do I beseech, O kind Redeemer, that thou wouldst deign to make me share in thy works and merits. This favour thou dost extend to all thy friends. I beg thee to be pleased to satisfy most fully thy heavenly Father and thyself for all the evil I have ever committed, and most fully to supply whatever good I have omitted. For thou art not less fully given for my salvation than for that of thy perfect friends, that in thee and through thee all my defects may be repaired and amended, and whatever in all I

* Ps. cxxxviii 16. † Ps. xxxvii 10.

have done may be wanting to the perfect accomplishment of thy will. Behold, O most loving Lord Jesus Christ, I desire for the rest of my life and for all eternity, to raise my will strongly and purely to thee, to resign it entirely to thy most gracious Will, and to offer it to thee as fully as any man ever did or ought to have done.

From this hour and for ever I wish and desire nothing in any way, in body or soul, except as thou willest. Nothing, more or less, in life or death, in what I have, need or suffer, in action or omission, do I desire except what is most pleasing to thee. In purity of intention, in true self-denial and love, in every good work and virtue and in all holiness, I wish to please thee, according to thy desire, as any one of thy best friends has ever pleased thee. I pray and heartily desire, O Lord, that during the rest of my life, night and day, every breath and every beating of my heart may praise and honour thee, serve thee, thank thee and show thee love. From the depths of my heart I now will and desire that what I have said may remain as my firm and unchangeable determination. And as often as, through my weakness, corruption and tendency to evil, through my negligence and forgetfulness, anything may be done otherwise, I protest that this is not my will but utterly

contrary to my will and determination. Help me, I beseech thee, and strengthen this will in me to the everlasting glory of thy Name. Amen.

4. Accustom thyself to dispose thy will in this kind of way, and to raise and direct it to God. For then God in his loving-kindness will accept the will for the deed, where thou canst do nothing more. In this way wilt thou feel, in the same most sweet Creator, a wonderful peace, liberty, joy, devotion and love. Moreover, often every day, either with words or in heart only, say shortly to God: "O most loving Lord God, to do thy most gracious will I desire to please thee, and in all things to show thee the highest and purest love."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE IMMENSE LOVE OF GOD FOR MAN

1. Two kinds of love God shows to man.
2. What certainty we can have of God's love.
3. Different degrees of moral certainty.
4. The love of God, that does not depend on our merits in any way, is most certain; and no created love can be compared to it.
5. Through that love God cannot will the damnation of any one unless he wilfully sins, and of sin God is not and cannot be the author.
6. Man has such liberty to sin or not to sin, that even he who by the eternal judgement of God has been condemned, is freely able to be converted if he wills, and to escape the sentence of damnation. It comes from the hardness of a man's heart if he freely chooses not to be converted.
7. To this freedom of man's will (which God wills to remain inviolate) join the thought of God's infinite goodness and mercy, and however timid and faint-hearted thou mayest be, holy confidence will be restored.

1. If only thou art a man of good will, the immense and incomprehensible love of God for man ought to encourage thee and give thee joy. Thou must, however, understand that there is a twofold love of God for man, of which we may call the first merited and the

second unmerited. The merited is that love which we can and ought to procure for ourselves by good works, exercise of virtues, keeping of the commandments of God and the counsels of Christ. The unmerited is that love which God has had for us from all eternity, an everlasting love which springs from his own nature and is immense. This we can in no way merit.

2. To some, in this life, to a certain extent the merited love of God towards them is hidden, as the Scripture says: *Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred.** This is hidden from them for their good and as a great help to salvation; it makes them more humble and constant to the end in good works and in the practice of virtue, to prevent the swelling of pride or the negligence of lukewarmness. Either of these evils might be the result of knowing for certain that they were in God's grace. I am inclined to believe (I speak under correction from those knowing better than I do) that that text of Scripture is applicable to an ordinary and imperfect man, not to him to whose spirit the Spirit of truth gives testimony that he is the son of God, according to the words of St Paul in Romans viii 16. For it is not written that "no one knoweth," but that *man knoweth not,* that is,

* Eccles. ix 1.

s man, by human knowledge, without the estimony of the Spirit of God.*

3. That we can have some knowledge that ve are in a state of grace and possess some ove arising from merit, the words of Christ n St John's Gospel evidently imply: *If any nan loveth me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him.*† For since God loves man who keeps his commandments, we are ot left altogether doubtful as to whether we re loved by God, if only we keep his comnands and his words. Certainly so far as ve are certain of our love to God, we are ertain of his love to us. For God says: *I ove them that love me.*‡ It is utterly impossible that the God of incomprehensible good-

* That we can be absolutely certain that we are n God's grace was an error of the reformers in the xteenth century. Cardinal Bellarmine treats oroughly of the whole question *De Controv. Fidei,* ook III, "On Justification." The Catholic doctine is that we cannot know, absolutely, without a evelation, but we can have a moral certainty, and is will be greater according to the greater charity f the soul. St Thomas discusses the subject in e *Summa,* Part I, quest. 23, "On Predestination," nd quest. 24, "On the Book of Life." We can have prudent and conjectural knowledge, judging by ie testimony of the Holy Spirit, from good signs. St Thomas treats this question more directly, I-II, u. 112, art. 5.—TRANSLATOR.]

† John xiv 23. ‡ Prov. viii 17.

ness could refuse his love to those that trul
love him. And this very merited love, b
which God embraces us on account of tru
love shown him, is of such infinite vehemenc
that it surpasses not only the understandin
but all the desires of man. It much mor
surpasses all angelical or human love than a
immense fire surpasses a little spark.

4. Now concerning the other kind of lov
the natural, gratuitous and unmerited love
God for us—as we are certain that God *is*, an
that he created us, so also we cannot doubt
that eternal love of us that we can in no wis
merit. And this kind of love also far exceed
all possible love whether of angels or of me
In fact, if you were to imagine the love, faith
fulness and kindness of all earthly mothe
united in one motherly heart towards an on
son, although such a mother would mo
intensely desire the temporal and eternal li
and salvation of her only son, yet this would
no way come near the charity, faithfulness an
loving-kindness with which God, the Fathe
Son and Holy Ghost, desires the temporal an
eternal salvation of every man. Hold it ther
fore as an undoubted truth that no mothe
even the most loving, ever grieved over th
loss and death of her only and cherished son
God, in his infinite love, over the perdition
any one man. The reason of this love is th

God has in a wonderful manner made every man after his own image and likeness. On his account does God make much of man and hold him in such esteem and his soul of such value that for his sake he has not spared even his only and most beloved Son, but has delivered him to a most bitter and disgraceful death. This also he has done with such unbounded love, with love so excessive, that we may, with all reverence, call it an intemperance of love. If there had been only one man to be redeemed, without doubt he would have redeemed him in the very same manner.*

5. Most certain is it that God in the eternal abyss of his charity, faithfulness and loving-kindness, cannot possibly desire the loss and damnation of any one man. Of him it is written with the deepest truth that *it is his property always to have mercy and to spare,* nor can he desire any one to perish, but *will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*† But since man has been endowed with the privilege of free-will, if he should wilfully and wickedly oppose the will of God, if he chooses deliberately to

* This infinite love of our Lord Jesus Christ for every soul is shown in the words of St Paul, who cried out in an ecstasy of loving gratitude, "He loved *me,* and delivered himself for *me,*" Gal. ii 20.

† 1 Tim. ii 4.

despise all God's instructions, exhortations, threats, commands, counsels, promises, in one word all his loving-kindness, and in his obstinacy should esteem it a slight evil to act against God and his own salvation, then indeed we cannot wonder that the Divine Justice should condemn him, as is clearly right and equitable.

6. This very freedom of will is so much a part of man's nature and puts salvation so much in his own power that any one, even after his crimes have now for many years condemned him to eternal damnation, can return from that state of everlasting perdition to the state of eternal happiness, by turning himself, through his freewill, away from sin, and turning himself to God and to righteousness.

This doctrine St Augustine confirms, saying: "God knows how to change his sentence if only thou learnest how to change thy sin. The fore-knowledge of God, by which he knoweth thy beginning, thy whole course, and thy end is certainly unchangeable, but not so his judgement or sentence."* For if thou

* St Augustine defends this loving doctrine, that the reprobate can, through God's grace, be converted to God. Thus, speaking of Esau, he says: "Esau did not will, and did not run; but if he had willed and had run, he would have arrived by the help of God."—*Ad Simplicianum*, Book I, qu. 2.

hadst lived in mortal sins a hundred years, to the very end of life, and on this account hadst been condemned to everlasting damnation, and now, at the very end of life, shouldst turn away from sin and return to God by confession, contrition and penance, and thus shouldst obtain his grace, that sentence and judgement of eternal damnation would be changed, and thou thyself wouldst be recalled to everlasting happiness. I beseech thee to let this love of God for thee, a love so immense and so gratuitous, touch thy heart.

7. Meditate attentively and with all the devotion of thy soul upon the goodness, sweetness, beauty, loving-kindness, mercy, charity, faithfulness and other perfections of our Creator and Redeemer that so attract our love. These perfections are in truth so immense and incomprehensible that they cannot be written down, spoken about or thought about in any worthy manner. For if all the angels and souls of men and all those yet to be created, were to wish to describe in writing even one of these perfections of God, a deep sea of ink would be exhausted and parchment equal in extent to the heavens above would be covered, and yet one of these attributes could not be adequately described, because it is infinite.*

* *Cf.* John xxi 25.

Loving meditation of this sort will cause thee to have in thy heart a far better idea of the gracious loving-kindness of thy God, and will bring to thy soul holy confidence, interior love and joy and all other good things. From this will it come to pass that all excessive fear of death will vanish, and gladly wilt thou await it.*

* *Cf.* Ps. cxxi 1.

CHAPTER XXXIII

OF THE MAN WHO AT THE END OF LIFE SINCERELY REPENTETH

1. Comfort for those converted in old age.
2. Whoever thinks otherwise does an injury to God's goodness.
3. Teaching of our Lord.
4. The love of Christ supplies all defects.
5. Even in purgatory there is comfort.
6. Who ought to fear a terrible purgatory.
7. Who ought to have much fear.
8. Comfort for true penitents in Scripture.

1. O THOU who, though now old or even in extreme age, hast abandoned all the filth of iniquity and sin, hast now, at last, begun to enter on the path of righteousness, and hast become a man of good will, wherefore shouldst thou so grievously fear, why shouldst thou be so down-hearted and sad, as if no hope of salvation were left? Remember, I beseech thee, remember thy most merciful, kind and sweet Redeemer Jesus Christ, who came into this world to save sinners. For sinners he became man, for sinners he laboured, for their sake he bore his bitter passion, shed his blood, and died.

2. The greatest dishonour thou canst show him, the worst injury thou canst do him, is to

despair of his loving-kindness, mercy and goodness, on account of the multitude, long continuance or enormity of thy crimes. Although, therefore, thou art now weighed down by the burden of years, even if thy life is soon to end, but thou hast at length begun to correct thy ways, thou hast no reason to give way to excessive fear. Yea, even if only one year, one month or one day remains to thee, be of good heart, there is no reason to be too much cast down. Nay, far from that, thou hast very great reason to rejoice, considering the immense mercy of God to thee. He has called thee back to himself before thy death. He has given thee a good will; and, therefore, as St Bernard teaches, he does not look so much at what thou wast, but at what thou dost now desire to be.

3. Perhaps the thought of all the time thou hast lost in thy past life, time spent in vanities and sins, fills thee with anguish of mind. If so, comfort thyself by meditating on the parable of our Lord that St Matthew* relates in his Gospel, and from it thou wilt be animated by pious and firm confidence. It is the parable of the householder hiring labourers for his vineyard. There we see that those who were hired at the eleventh hour and sent into the vineyard, although

* Matt. xx.

they laboured for one hour only, received the penny,* equally with those who had borne the burden and heat of the day. Those who were hired at the eleventh hour represent to us those who in old age, or the last hour of their life, begin to live soberly, righteously and godly, while those who had borne the burden and heat of the day bring to our minds those who have served God from their youth. The same doctrine is found in St Luke,† for our Saviour calls blessed not only those who in the first and second, but also those who in the third watch were found ready.

4. Nor shouldst thou be overcome by excessive fear on account of having not heaped up treasure in heaven through past meritorious actions, for since thou art now joined to Christ through good will, God's grace and true charity, as a living member of his body thou hast become a sharer in his merits and those of all his elect. Thou wilt receive the heavenly inheritance, because thou art of the number of the sons of God. Evidently thou art now of the number of those of whom St Paul speaks when he writes: *Now, therefore, there is no condemnation to them that are in*

* The Roman penny was the eighth part of an ounce, which, at 5s. the ounce, is 7½d.—TRANSLATOR.

† *Cf.* Luke xii 38.

Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh. Therefore, full of joy, thou canst and oughtest to look forward to the "blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and might cleanse to himself a people acceptable, a pursuer of good works." Now also it is right that thou shouldst hear with immense joy these words: *Jesus Christ was delivered up for our sins, and rose again for our justification.** And these: *In this is charity; not as though we had loved God, but because he hath first loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*† And again: *Jesus Christ loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood.*‡

5. But perhaps thou fearest that the pains of purgatory will await thee at thy going forth from this world. Any excessive fear of this kind must be put aside. Above all things, it is most necessary to resign thyself entirely to God and gladly to allow him to do with thee whatever he will. As thou lovest his mercy, so thou must love his justice.§ God is a

* Rom. iv 25. † 1 John iv 10.

‡ Apoc. i 5.

§ Because his mercy and his justice are both himself. In loving either we love him. A useful aspiration when agitated by the passion of fear,

most fond and gentle Father, whether in this life or in purgatory;* he scourges his sons, it is true, but those who in this world turn from sin with their whole heart and turn to him, he punisheth with fatherly love. Never doubt his fatherly kindness. As thou now dost truly desire and try to please him and art now sorry to have offended him, be sure that at thy departure from this world he will receive thee not harshly but with loving-kindness, and will cherish thee in the bosom of his mercy. Even if thou must go to purgatory, thou wilt not be there without any comfort or refreshment. There thou wilt be certain of salvation and future happiness, and thou wilt be there gladly rather than here in this world, where there are so many occasions of offending God. On this account we are told that a holy man used to say: "If after death I knew for certain that I should be detained in purgatory, I should be delighted now to have my head cut off, that I might be certain of my salvation."

6. On the other hand there are those with too little fear. They are the careless and negligent who do not truly desire to amend their lives, and often say in a flippant way:

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whether of purgatory or anything else, is: "Here I am, O Lord; do with me what thou wilt, only give me thy holy love."—TRANSLATOR.

* *Cf.* Heb. xii 7.

"It is quite enough to avoid hell; I do not mind purgatory." But they speak in a most foolish and frivolous way, and know not what they say, for those who, in this world, remain purposely and without effort in their negligences and vices, ought to look forward to a most grievous and horrible purgatory, if even the favour is given them of going to purgatory at all, and not to hell.

7. But do thou, O man of good will, who now hatest all sin and desirest to love God and to live to him, cast aside all immoderate fear. For they who have charity and, when they die, are truly turned in mind to God, even if they take something with them which needs purification, are indeed happy; for they can never be separated from God. When they have been fully purified, they will enter their heavenly fatherland with glory. For this reason is it written: *Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord.**

8. In good truth no one who carefully considers the parable of the prodigal son,† and sees how mercifully and lovingly he was received by his father, can in any way despair. The holy Scripture, the word of truth, everywhere affords immense comfort and confidence to those who repent and are truly converted to God.

* Apoc. xiv 13. † *Cf.* Luke xv.

Think how Isaias speaks: *Let the wicked forsake his way and the unjust man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he is bountiful to forgive.**

In like manner doth Joel say: *Turn to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil.*†

And through the mouth of Ezechiel God comforts us thus: *When the wicked man turneth himself away from his wickedness which he hath wrought, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.*‡ *I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done: in his justice which he hath wrought he shall live. Is it my will that a sinner should die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should be converted from his ways and live?*§

Tobias also says: *Be converted, therefore, ye sinners, and do right before God, believing that he will show his mercy to you.*‖

Again doth Isaias say: *Who is there among you who hath walked in darkness, and hath no light? Let him hope in the name of the Lord and lean upon his God.*¶

* Isa. lv 7.
† Joel ii 13.
‡ Ezec. xviii 27.
§ Ezec. xviii 22, 23.
‖ Tob. xiii 8.
¶ Isa. l 10.

Numberless testimonies of the same thing are found in the divine writings, which bring most effectual help to a sinner now converted, but tempted to despair for want of confidence.

CHAPTER XXXIV

COMFORT FOR THE HOUR OF DEATH

SECTION I

DEATH SHOULD NOT BE TOO MUCH FEARED

1. Simeon teaches that the good should desire death as the time of entering into liberty.
2. Also because death ends the battle with evil.
3. The only way of going to God and the society of the blessed.
4. Let the dying devoutly embrace the feet of Christ.

*From St Ambrose.**

1. When his parents brought the Child Jesus into the temple, Simeon, who had received an answer that he should not die till he had seen the Christ of the Lord, received him into his arms and rejoiced, saying: *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation,*† implying that he had been kept in this world not by any desire of his own, but simply because it was necessary to do God's will. When he has seen Christ, he asks to be allowed to depart in peace, in order to go from chains to

* *On the Advantages of Death.*

† Luke ii 29.

liberty. For the soul receives liberty when it is separated from the companionship of the body, and goes forth from the darkness that covers it in this world. After death it can act more freely than before, because it acts of itself, not by means of the body, which is a heavy weight on the soul and hinders its activity.

2. To the righteous death is the harbour of peace. Fools fear death as the worst evil; the wise desire it as the rest after labour and the end of evils. Through death all that is unquiet and shameful is put to rest, war is finished, violence ceases, the tempest is over, that part of our nature which had a corrupt tendency to vice lies still and is shut up in the grave; but that higher part of our being that loved virtue, was a friend to discipline, followed good, was subject to God, flies upward to him, that it may remain for ever with him, the immortal God, may cleave to him and be with him.

3. We must not then fear to leave the society of men, nor must we too much dread the necessary end of all things here below. Bravely and fearlessly should we go to Jesus our Redeemer, to the society of the saints and the household of the righteous. We shall go to our fathers, to those who taught us our faith, so that even if we have been wanting in many

good works, true faith may help us.* We shall go to the company of those who have already sat down *in the kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ;*† where the repentant thief rejoices in the fellowship of the heavenly kingdom.‡ We shall go to the Paradise of joy, where there are no clouds, no thunder, no lightning, no stormy winds, no darkness, no winter, no constant changes. Cold, hail-storms, rain, will not there be found. The light of the sun, the moon and the stars, will not be there,§ for the glory of God enlightens it and *the Lamb is the light thereof.*

4. When about to die we must piously and lovingly seek our Lord Jesus Christ himself and embrace his feet. We must adore him with those women to whom he appeared on the day of his resurrection, that he may say also to us: *All hail ! fear not !*‖ That is, fear not on account of your iniquities, for I am the Remission of sins; fear not darkness, for I am the Light; fear not death, for I am Life; " whosoever cometh to me shall not see death for ever."

* " Although he hath sinned, yet he hath not denied the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, but hath believed; hath had in him zeal for God, and God who made all things faithfully hath he adored " (The Church's prayer for the dying).—TRANSLATOR.

† Matt. viii 11.

‡ *Cf.* Luke xxiii 40.

§ *Cf.* Apoc. xxi 23.

‖ Matt. xxviii 9, 10.

SECTION II

OF A GOOD AND HAPPY DEATH

1. At death unite yourself to the merits and sufferings of Christ.
2. Complete and loving resignation.
3. Full and pure resignation coming from true and perfect charity can free us from all guilt and punishment.
4. Support the weakness of nature at death by the thought of the sufferings of Christ.
5. Also by the certain hope of resurrection through Christ.
6. By the examples of the saints, who died in joy magnifying the Lord.
7. And by the hope of eternal glory.

1. He who is about to die must lean more on the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ than on anything of his own. He must trust entirely in the goodness of Jesus Christ, in the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the saints, and the elect of God. He should remember the most bitter passion and death of Christ, and refresh himself with the thought of that unspeakable charity which made him suffer so much pain and disgrace. He should call to mind the open wounds of Christ, and he should cast himself with all his sins and negligences into the deep sea of his immense mercy. He should offer himself to the greater glory of God, to the Lord himself, as a living victim, to bear patiently according to his most

acceptable will, with true love, all pain and languor and death itself, in one word whatever the Lord may will to send in time or in eternity. If he can really do this, if from pure love, with perfect resignation of himself, he can offer himself with a will ready to bear every pain in honour of the justice of God, he will go neither to hell nor even to purgatory, though he himself had committed all the sins of the whole world. No exercise then can be more useful at death than to resign oneself absolutely to the divine Will, humbly, lovingly and fully trusting in the mercy and goodness of God.

2. This is certain, that any one who, in a spirit of true and perfect resignation and holy confidence in God, goes forth from this world, will fly immediately to the kingdom of heaven. For just as no kind of pain, no touch of the fire of purgatory could possibly affect God, so also would it be powerless to affect a man perfectly united to God in entire and loving conformity of will.

3. In this spirit did that repenting thief dying on a cross become a righteous man. He asked not from the Lord the healing of his body, nor did he pray to be delivered from purgatory, but willing to die for his sins and for the glory of God he resigned himself wholly to the will of God, and offered himself

entirely to Christ that he might do with him whatsoever should be pleasing to him. He asked for nothing except mercy and grace, saying: *Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom.**

4. If, as death draws near, the soul, from the weakness of nature, grows sad and full of fear, this sadness and fear must be cast upon God through resignation, and unwavering hope must be placed in him. Let the death of Christ comfort thee in thy death. He hath gone before; numberless elect souls have gone the same way; do not thou be unwilling to follow them. The body which now thou puttest off, look on as a worn-out garment. What will it matter to thee that it goes to corruption, and is hidden for a time in the earth? Afterwards this same body shall rise again, immortal, incorruptible, shining with glory.

5. In order more easily to lessen the fear of death, call to mind the words of the only-begotten Son of God, who is truth itself, saying: *I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live; and every one that liveth and believeth in me, shall not die for ever.*†

Meditate also on those words of the Apostle St Paul: *Whether we live, we live unto the*

* Luke xxiii 42. † John xi 25.

*Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.**

6. Then we should consider how resigned in their wills at the hour of death were the saints of the old law, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and many others, although the gates of the kingdom of heaven had not yet been opened. At the end of the book of Deuteronomy we read that the Lord said unto Moses:

Go up into this mountain, Abarim, unto Mount Nebo . . . and see the land of Chanaan, which I will deliver to the children of Israel to possess, and die thou in the mountain. When thou art gone up into it, thou shalt be gathered to thy people, as Aaron thy brother died in Mount Hor, and was gathered to his people. Because thou didst trespass against me in the midst of the children of Israel, at the waters of contradiction, in Cades of the desert of Sin; and thou didst not sanctify me among the children of Israel.†

And further on we read:

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab upon Mount Nebo to the top of Phasga over against Jericho, and the Lord showed him all the land. . . . And the Lord said to him: This is the land for which I swore to Abraham,

* Rom. xiv 8. † Deut. xxxii 49-51.

*Isaac and Jacob, saying : I will give it to thy seed. Thou hast seen it with thine eyes, and shalt not pass over to it. And Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there, in the land of Moab, by the commandment of the Lord.**

Behold with what a resigned soul, according to the good pleasure of God, Moses, the friend of the Most High, received death. He did not indeed pass over to that visible promised land, but he was received into an invisible and better land, into that secret place of peace called Limbo, in which the souls of the righteous before Christ rested in deep tranquillity.†

7. But what a difference Christ our Lord has made ! Now the everlasting gates of the heavenly country have been opened for the righteous by him. We, therefore, who spend our weary days here in a far-off country, as pilgrims and exiles away from home, should daily desire and sigh after our fatherland above. There is the country of the angels; there the clime that knows no winter. We must hasten to reach that bright and happy paradise abounding in lovely spiritual flowers, saying with St Paul: *While we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord ;* for *we know, if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not*

* Deut. xxxiv 1-5. † See Note C at end.

*made by hands, eternal in heaven ;** therefore, *we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come.*†

In that happy state we shall never again offend God, never be displeasing in his eyes. In all things we shall do his will; we shall love him perfectly and praise him for ever and ever. *We shall see him as he is.*‡ With endless joy shall we embrace him; our desire will be fulfilled, for we shall possess him and enjoy him for all eternity.

There shall we abound in every delight and in all riches. Whatsoever there is in created things to excite our love, whatever there is of beauty, sweetness and perfection which delights or attracts us in them, all this, in an eminent and supernatural way, shall we find in God and in our eternal fatherland. God, the glorious Creator of all things, is infinitely more beautiful, sweet and worthy of love than all created things;§ from him flows forth

* 2 Cor. v 6, and v 1. † Heb. xiii 14.

‡ 1 John iii 2.

§ Three things, says St Thomas, render a person lovable and attract our love powerfully: (1) *Gratiositas in vultu*—that is, a countenance expressing grace, favour, loving-kindness, gracefulness, loveliness. (2) *Affabilitas in convictu*—affability or courtesy, gentleness, sweetness of manner and conduct in ordinary life and intercourse. *Convictus* is a living together in one house or at one table. (3) *Mansue-*

whatever, in this exile, brings joy to man's heart and gives him delight. The very least joy of the heavenly country excels all the joys of this world, as much as the vast waters of the sea surpass one little drop.* We must look then on heaven as our own fatherland, and long for it with intense desire. To that land may the most kind Jesus lead us. Amen.

Prayer†

O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to have one will, give to thy people to love what thou dost command, and to desire what thou hast promised: that amid all the changes of this world our hearts may be fixed there where true joys are. Through Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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tudo in actu—meekness, sweet gentleness, pleasant cheerfulness in all he does. Jesus Christ displays these three attractions in the highest possible way, and, therefore, is worthy of our highest and deepest love.—Translator.

* All the joys of earth are only in the order of nature, while the least joy of heaven is supernatural.—Translator.

† Collect for 4th Sunday after Easter (added by Translator.)

SECTION III

MORE COMFORT AS DEATH DRAWETH NIGH

1. Christians should rejoice to be delivered by death from prison, to go to their most merciful God.
2. Nor should past sin too much trouble their peace.
3. Death the end of labour and the harbour of refuge.
4. Longer life may heap up debts, not reward.
5. Welcome the will of God with joy.
6. The effect of this exhortation.

*From Blessed Henry Suso, O.P.**

1. WHEN thou seest that God's will is that thy life should now end, firmly hold the Catholic faith, and thou shalt die with joy.† Rejoice that thy soul, fair in God's eyes, because it is a pure spirit, rational and made after the image of God himself, is now about to go forth from the narrow, miserable and grievous prison of the body, and henceforth to enjoy perfect happiness and beatitude.

2. One thing especially is apt to terrify those not experienced in these matters, and to make the thought of death bitter to them, filling their souls with dark forebodings. I mean the depressing remembrance of past years, and of the careless life they have led, spending their time badly; they feel how

* In a letter to a good man near to death (*Epist.* 6).
† *Cf.* 2 Tim. iv 7, and Ps. cxxi 1.

serious a debt they owe to God, nor in the late evening of their days do they see how they can repair past neglect.

If thou feelest thus depressed and troubled, I will give thee the following safe advice, founded on the doctrine of holy Scripture and also on experience. If thou full well knowest that in past days thou hast lived amiss (and few live free from vice), thou must not, as death draws near, be too much terrified. After thou hast been strengthened with the sacraments of the Church, put the image of the Crucified before thine eyes, look fixedly at it, press it to thy heart, and take refuge in the blood-stained wounds of his immense mercy. Pray that he may deign to wash away all thy sins in those same wounds from which he shed his blood. Ask this from the pure motive of giving honour and praise to him. Beg this of God in the name of Jesus Christ because thou art poor and needy. Then believe me thou mayest feel secure. Yea, according to the faith of the Catholic Church, which can in no way deceive, if only thou art able to do as I have described, thou art entirely absolved from thy sins and canst meet death joyfully.*

* Because of intense contrition founded on love, and on account of the power of the Precious Blood.—TRANSLATOR.

3. Surely death ought to be welcome as the end of labour and the safe harbour of refuge. Remember, I beseech thee, the constant misery of this life, how many crosses and sorrows, how many anxieties and needs are found everywhere. In truth, if there were nothing except a desire for the safety of body and soul to be considered, the changes and tribulations of this life are so many and so trying that we might well wish to go out of it.

4. If anyone is tempted, as death approaches, to wish to live longer, under the plea that he may thus heap up greater treasure in heaven, let him consider how uncertain it is whether a longer life would increase his merits or his debts. Oftentimes sins increase with age. Thou wilt find many getting worse as time goes on rather than better. If death now is bitter, yet consider that a good death puts an end at once to all bitterness.

5. Courage, therefore, my son! Lift up thy heart, thy hands and thine eyes to thy heavenly country, and salute it with a loving soul. Resign thy will to the Will of God, and be not unduly attached to the things of earth. Whatever he pleases to do with thee, whether he wills thee to live longer or to die now, receive it from his hands as the best thing that can happen to thee. Fear not: behold the holy angels assist thee: they surround thee,

and camp about thee.* God, full of loving-kindness and mercy, will deliver thee from all thy distress, with a more than fatherly love, if only thou art able to trust in his goodness. Farewell.

6. After the dying man had received these comforting words, refreshed in mind, he begged that the letter might be read to him twice over. When these holy and sweet words of encouragement had sunk into his soul, he was filled with new confidence, and putting aside the terror and excessive fear of death which had before tormented him, he resigned himself, with liberty of spirit, to the will of God, and departed peacefully out of this world.

* *Cf.* Ps. xxxiii 8.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE PATRONAGE OF THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN THE COMFORT OF THE SORROWFUL

1. Intercession of the Blessed Virgin our advocate.
2. All need her prayers, the greatest sinners most.
3. Her prayers often save despairing sinners.
4. Her only Son has reserved this honour for his Mother.

*From Blessed Henry Suso, O.P.**

1. O GLORIOUS Queen of heaven, Virgin Mary! When an immense weight of grief, fear and sadness presses us, miserable men, to the earth, and fills our hearts with anguish, and we see no way of escape, this one thing only remains to us—namely, to raise our eyes to thee. And indeed we desire to find thee always, but especially at the hour of death, our kind helper and consoler.

2. Thou art the advocate of all sinful men with thy Son. Therefore the more a man finds himself entangled in the nets of sin, the more reason has he to fly to thee; and the more guilty he is, the greater reason has he to hasten to thee. Thou art the comfort of the sorrowful, the refuge of sinners. To thee, O Mary, many weeping eyes are daily turned; to thee a multitude of wounded and sorrowing hearts

* *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, xvi.

send up their sighs. Turn then on me, miserable as I am, thine eyes of mercy. Thou art not able to turn them away from any poor, wretched and miserable man. Receive me under thy trusty protection, for my comfort and my hope are in thee.

3. Oh, how many sinful men had already abandoned God, had given up all hope of gaining the kingdom of heaven—how many had even denied God himself, had cast themselves headlong into the depth of despair and were miserably separated from God, and yet by leaning on thee and flying to thee have been most kindly kept by thee, until by thy prayers they have been restored at length to God's grace! Was there ever a sinner so great, so tightly bound with the chains of iniquity, that, remembering thee, was not inspired with fresh courage and hope? Thou, verily, art the one chosen and most faithful comforter of sinful men.

4. The immense loving-kindness of God hath made thee an object of love to all sinners, that thine abundant motherly affection and tenderness may move our hearts and refresh our spirits. How often hast thou not softened or averted the just wrath of the severe Judge! How often hast thou obtained grace and consolation from thy Son! Sooner would heaven and earth perish than thou wouldst refuse help

to any one earnestly imploring thine assistance. Truly thou art called, and art, the mother and queen of mercy. Therefore, most tender mother, mistress of heaven and earth, arise! Arise, and show thyself an advocate and peace-maker for us with thy most sweet Son, that he as a favour to thee may blot out all our sins and bring us to life everlasting. Amen.

CHAPTER XXXVI

ENTIRE RESIGNATION TO THE GOOD PLEASURE OF GOD

1. The penitent should comfort himself humbly with the satisfaction made for his sins by Christ.
2. He should resign himself lovingly to Christ suffering, prepared for any purgatory God may appoint.

*From Blessed Henry Suso, O.P.**

1. SOME indeed, O Lord Jesu, may comfort themselves by the thought of the innocence of their lives; others by remembering their austere way of living and their exercise of virtue; some are cheered by one thing, others by another; but I have all my hope and comfort only in thy passion, in thy satisfaction and expiation wrought for me, and in thy merits only do I trust.

2. O Lord, this I may say: after a shorter or longer time of life thou wilt call me out of this world. Even at that hour, when departing hence, if I knew that it would be for thy praise that I should remain for fifty years in the flames of purgatory,† I would cast myself

* *Eternal Wisdom.*

† We should try in perfect resignation to look at the pains of purgatory from God's point of view rather than our own. If we fear them as keeping us from him and being against his will, rather than

in adoration at thy feet, and with my whole soul I would willingly accept these pains for thy honour and glory, and I would say: "Blessed be that purifying fire by which thy praise is perfected in me."

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only as disagreeable to us, we are far more likely to escape them. This is in no sense thinking lightly of them, which would offend God.—TRANSLATOR.

CHAPTER XXXVII

COMFORT DRAWN FROM THE THOUGHT OF ETERNAL HAPPINESS

1. In heaven we have numberless friends.
2. Images of heaven from the Bible.
3. Society of our Lady, the angels and saints.
4. Essential reward, the clear vision of God and union with him in glory.
5. Compare the glory of the saints with their sufferings here.
6. Devout aspiration of the soul after heaven.

From Blessed Henry Suso, O.P.

1. *The Voice of Christ.*—Lift up the eyes of thy soul, and consider thine own country the heavenly paradise. On earth thou art only a stranger, an exile, a pilgrim. Therefore, as a pilgrim hastens home, where his beloved friends await him with great eagerness and loving expectation, so oughtest thou to hasten to that heavenly country where all desire most earnestly to see thee. From the depths of their hearts they are looking forward to thy happy coming, longing to welcome thee with love, to receive thee most courteously, and to admit thee into their joyful society for ever.

Believe me, thou hast there such a multitude of loving friends that even he, who in that vast number is the most unknown to thee, loves thee far more dearly and faithfully than

ever any parents love their offspring here below.*

2. Under the similitude of certain material images, I will set before thy imagination some distant idea of thy true country. Behold above the ninth heaven, which is incomparably larger than the whole earth, there is another heaven called the empyrean or highest heaven, the fiery heaven—so called, not from fire but from the immeasurably transparent brightness, immovable and unchangeable, which lies in its nature. This is the glorious court in which dwell the heavenly hosts, *where the morning star, with the rest, praises me, and all the children of God rejoice.*† There stand, encompassed with inconceivable light, the everlasting thrones, from which the evil spirits were hurled, on which the elect are seated. See how the delightful city shines, as it were, with beaten gold! How it glitters with costly jewels, inlaid with precious stones, transparent as crystal, adorned with red roses, white lilies and all flowers! Now look on the beautiful heavenly fields themselves. Lo, here all delights of summer; here sunny meads of May; here the very valley of bliss; here the delightful company of souls united in perfect friendship; harps and viols sweetly

* St Cyprian, *De Mortalitate.*

† Job xxxviii 7.

sound. Here all joys abound; every desire is satisfied; everything happy, unmingled with sorrow, in everlasting security.

3. Now look how the countless multitude drink to their hearts' content of the fountain of living water, *drinking of the torrent of God's pleasure.** Look how they feast their eyes on the clear mirror of the unveiled face of God, in which they see all things.

Draw nearer and see how the sweet Queen of the heavenly kingdom, my Mother, whom thou lovest with such ardour, sits aloft in dignity and joy over the whole host of heaven, inclining tenderly on me, her beloved, flowing with delights, encircled with roses and lilies of the valley. See how her ravishing beauty fills with delight and wonder all the heavenly choirs! Now behold what will rejoice thy heart and soul, and see how the Mother of compassion has turned her eyes of mercy towards thee and all sinners, and how powerfully she appeals to me, her beloved Son, and intercedes with me. Now turn round, with the eyes of pure understanding, and see how the thousands of the heavenly hosts minister to me, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stand before me. See how that immense multitude of most high spirits are sweetly, lovingly, joyfully constituted,

* Ps. xxxv 9.

arranged and ordered, each one differing from the other. What joy comes from the sight! Turn next thy glance, and see how my chosen disciples and best beloved friends sit in repose and honour on their awful judgement seats; how the white-robed army of martyrs glitter; the confessors shine brightly; how refulgent the virgins appear in their angelic purity; how all the heavenly host overflows with divine sweetness! What a joyous company! Blessed, thrice blessed, is he who was born to dwell where they dwell. Those who enter here are adorned interiorly with the garment of eternal light, of that glory which lifts the sight of the soul above all natural powers; and exteriorly the body is made glorious, seven times brighter than the sun, swift, subtle and unable to suffer.

4. The essential reward, that all possess, is contemplative union with God, face to face. This, I repeat, is the chief beatitude of the soul, seeing God's face unveiled. For the soul cannot enjoy complete rest until, lifted far above its natural powers, it is enabled to see the essence of God, not under any figure, but face to face. In that contemplation the soul finds true and eternal happiness. Into that vast solitude and unfathomable abyss of the Godhead the blessed are immersed. In this they will be, as it were, melted; into it they

will flow and be perfectly united in will. Raise then thy countenance joyfully; forget all thy trials, and comfort thy heart in this vision, obscure from excess of light, where the blessed rejoice, seeing that which thou canst only contemplate under gross figures. See how fair those faces appear, which on earth were so often reddened with shame for my sake.

5. *The Voice of the Pious Man.*—O citizens of heaven, how happy are ye! Where now are the crosses, trials, sorrows and other sad things that once afflicted you? Behold, they have vanished like a dream, as if they never had given you any pain. In good truth, if all hearts were made one heart, they could not form the least idea of the immense honour, dignity, praise and glory you enjoy. O bright princes, kings and emperors, most beloved sons of the eternal God, how shining are your faces, how joyful your hearts, how great and sublime your souls, how sweetly you sing with ravishing melody that song: *Amen. Benediction and glory and wisdom, and thanksgiving, honour and power and strength to our God, for ever and ever. Amen!** Blessed be God, by whose grace and goodness we enjoy these everlasting goods.

6. This, then, is thy fatherland. Here thou wilt enjoy perfect repose, intimate joy

* Apoc. vii 12.

of heart, praise from the inmost depth of thy being—and all for ever. O God, the highest and incomprehensible Good, what art thou? O most sweet and most loving Lord Jesus, how truly blessed is he who will contemplate for ever thy most joyful face, and share in that most pleasing society of the citizens of heaven. Thine eyes, O Lord, are brighter than the sun. Thy divine mouth, that droppeth words of sweetness, thy sacred cheeks glowing and bright with glory, representing thy Godhead and thy Manhood, thy countenance—surpass in beauty all that human heart can desire.

Whatever is comely, lovely and attractive—all is found in thee, O God of sweetness, above all thought or measure. Nothing pleasing, nothing giving joy, nothing worthy of any praise was ever found in any man that doth not shine out in thee in an eminent and infinite degree.

A Short Prayer of a Friend of God

O good Jesu, grant to me, I beseech thee, true contrition, holy, loving and divine. If only we have that, thou wilt deign not only to forgive all the guilt of our sins but also entirely to remit all the punishment due to them, and this through thy most holy life and most bitter passion. Oh, would that I had never offended thee! Oh, when it comes to pass that

I must die, grant that I may end my life in thy grace and friendship. Oh, wash me with thy Precious Blood. Grant that when my soul leaveth my body, it may appear before thee completely cleansed, to thy eternal praise. Let thy most gracious will, O loving Jesu, be done in me and by me for time and eternity. To thee be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CERTAIN WONDERFUL THINGS SPOKEN OF GOD'S MERCY BY MANY OF HIS FRIENDS FOR THE COMFORT OF THE FAINT-HEARTED

SECTION I

HOW IMMENSE IS THE MERCY OF GOD

1. Despair denies to God his attributes of patience and truth.
2. God's mercy is a greater marvel than his almighty power.
3. In the mercy of God there is greatness, multitude, excess and no limit.
4. In his works, his mercy, by which he doth all for us, is more worthy of praise than his power, by which he hath wrought such wonderful things.

1. If any one should abandon the hope of pardon and cast himself into the bottomless pit of despair, not only does he show that he does not believe God to be almighty, thinking that there is a sin too great for him to forgive, but he also makes God to speak what is untrue. For he has promised by the prophet Ezechiel that *immediately the sinner repenteth* he *will forget all the sins he had committed.** Against this the followers of Cain cry out: "My iniquity is too great to be forgiven!" What dost thou say, wicked man? If thou darest

* Ezec. xviii 22.

to say that GOD, overcome by the greatness of sin, is not able to forgive thee, thou dost deny his omnipotence; if thou dost presume to say that " he *can* forgive, but he *will* not," then dost thou declare him to be a liar and changeable, because thou dost declare that he will not carry out what he has so often promised by his prophets.

2. What do we read in Psalm cxliv, verse 8?

The Lord is gracious and merciful,
Patient and plenteous in mercy,
The Lord is sweet to all,
And his tender mercies are above all his works.

Therefore is his mercy more wonderful even than the power by which he made the heavens with their innumerable stars, founded the earth with so many kinds of living creatures, with such a variety of trees and plants, and peopled heaven with such vast hosts of angelical spirits. Who would have dared to assert, unless the prophet had clearly declared it, that the mercies of the Lord surpass all the other works of his hand?

3. The inspired word of God calls the mercy of the Lord sometimes " great," sometimes " excessive " (*nimium*), and sometimes, by speaking of the " multitude of his mercies," it enlarges our idea of the abundance and rich store of his goodness. The famous king and prophet David in the same place speaks

at once of this greatness and multitude, saying:

Have mercy on me, O God,
According to thy great mercy ;
And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies
*Blot out my iniquity.**

Where misery is great, there great mercy is needed. If we consider how atrocious was the sin of David, we shall understand the greatness of the mercy that forgave him. If we reflect on the various sins he committed in that one crime, we shall acknowledge the multitude of God's mercies to him. GOD himself, our King, our Father, our Lord, our Spouse excepts no kind of sin, prescribes no limit to the number of sins in his promise to forgive. As often as we truly repent with real penitence, he remits the punishment he threatened, receives us back into his family, leads us into the inner sanctuary of his love. Nor does he only receive us, but he also forgets all we have done. On his shoulders does he carry back the lost sheep to the fold, invites the assembly of the saints to rejoice with him, meets the prodigal son coming home from the far off country, brings forth the first robe and the ring, gives orders for the fatted calf to be slain. What does all this point to, except what we may call his immeasurable or *exces-*

* Ps. l 1.

sive mercy?* Nor must we wonder that he has excessive mercy, who has for us excessive charity. St Paul writing to the Ephesians does not hesitate to say: *We were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest: but God, who is rich in mercy, for his exceeding charity wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together in Christ, by whose grace ye are saved, and hath raised us up together, and hath made us sit together in the heavenly places through Christ Jesus.*†

More plainly still does our Lord himself express the excessive nature of his Father's love for us, saying: *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.*‡

In perfect harmony does St Paul chime in, saying: *He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not also, with him, given us all things?*§ Charity so great, mercy so great—is it not rightly called immeasurable, even immoderate?

4. Since we have nothing which we have not gratuitously received from God, all that we are, all we can do, all we possess, is all

* *Immodicam quamdam ac nimiam* (*ut ita dixerim*) *Dei misericordiam.*—The immoderate and too great (if I may dare say so) mercy of God.

† Eph. ii 3-6. ‡ John iii 16. § Rom. viii 32.

God's mercy. The very angels above, and the earth he has founded, are his mercy. If the earth had made itself, its power and wisdom could be praised; but as he created all these things for us, should we not acknowledge his immense mercy? For whom do the heavenly bodies revolve, for whom does the sun shine down in the day, the moon and stars by night, except for man? For whose use were all these things made out of nothing? For whose advantage do the clouds spread their shade and water the fertile earth? For whom does the soft air breathe, the rivers flow, springs gush forth, the seas toss their waves, the lakes hold their waters?* Nothing he has made, has he not made subject to man; man does he will to be subject only to himself.

SECTION II

THE IMMENSE MERCY OF GOD SHOWN BOTH BY THE TRIALS HE ALLOWS AND BY THE LONG-SUFFERING WITH WHICH HE WAITS FOR SINNERS

1. Adversity, being the effect of mercy, demands thanksgiving.
2. Those best understand God's mercy who best understand their own misery.
3. God's mercy arises from his faithful love.

1. ADVERSITY is often sent by the mercy of God, that it may purify us from past sin, may

* *Cf.* Ps. viii; Gen. i 26-28; 1 Cor. xv 27; Heb. ii 8.

keep us from those we are inclined to commit, and may supply us with opportunities of practising virtue. In this way was Abraham tested.* For this purpose was Job tried by divers afflictions. Yea, *all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution*† in this world, and must be tried by divers tribulations, *as gold is tried in the fire.*‡ Who are those who murmur against God whenever sickness attacks their bodies, or death carries away children or wife, or when they lose property, or the fruits of their fields fail, not understanding that these things are unmistakable signs of God's mercy? Instead of complaining, let us listen to the voice of Solomon, who writes:

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord:
Neither be weary of his reproof:
For whom the Lord loveth he reproveth,
Even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.§

The same idea with a little change of expression does St Paul repeat to the Hebrews, saying: *Whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth, and he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*‖ Whenever therefore we meet a storm of adversity, according to the advice of St Paul, let us *persevere under discipline*, for the merciful

* *Cf.* Gen. xxii 1.
† 2 Tim. iii 12.
‡ Ecclus. ii 5.
§ Prov. iii 11.
‖ Heb. xii 6.

God *dealeth with us as his sons*. If the mercy of our Father indulges us with some fine weather we must give him thanks, and be careful never to abuse his loving-kindness. When, on the other hand, we feel weighed down with trials, we must on no account cease to thank him, giving up our whole selves to his will. In order to secure the health of the body thou deliverest thyself into the hands of a surgeon, who is only a man. Thou allowest him to bind, to cut, or to burn; wilt thou not then, to secure the eternal salvation of thy soul, trust thyself to thy Maker, thy Lord, thy Father, thy Saviour? To the doctor thou dost not presume to say, "Cure me in this way, not in that"; and shall we dare to prescribe to God how he ought to act for our salvation?

2. Every one of us should go down into the inmost recess of his conscience, and there deeply consider in how many ways, how often, and how grievously he has offended God; how even his best deeds* are disfigured by vices in various ways. In this way he will form a better idea of how much he owes to the immense mercy of God, who bears so patiently with our weakness, invites us to

* Not that our virtuous actions are sins, but our good works are in God's sight in many ways mixed with a multitude of defects and imperfections.

penitence on so many different occasions, and forgives all our evil so gently when we repent and are converted to him. That man certainly is in every way a right object of tearful pity who turns away from the Fountain of life everlasting and never returns by penitence to him from whom he departed. The prodigal son went away into a far distant country and left the home of a most loving father; but he returned. Peter went away far from the Lord when he thrice denied him, but soon he returned when he remembered the word that Jesus had spoken. He then began to weep bitterly. He forgot himself, but he returned to himself. He returned to Jesus.

3. Listen how kindly the Lord, through the mouth of Jeremias, calls back his people to repentance. He uses figurative words, speaking to Israel as to a wife who had been long and in many ways unfaithful to her husband. No injury could be greater; yet saith the Lord: *Return to me, and I will receive thee.** And in the Book of Job, Eliu says of God:

He shall open their ear to correct them ;
And shall speak, that they may return from iniquity.†

Miserable indeed is the lot of those who stop their ears, lest they should hear the voice of the Lord: *To-day, if you shall hear his voice,*

* Jer. iii 1. † Job xxxvi 10.

*harden not your hearts.** This is "to-day" for us; to-day, as long as we are in this life; as long as ever it lasteth, the Lord doth not cease to speak to us, exhorting us to repent, offering us the pardon he holdeth ready prepared.

SECTION III

COMFORTING WITNESS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT ABOUT GOD'S MERCY TO SINNERS

1. God promises to forget as well as to forgive.
2. After forgiving he crowns penitents with merits.
3. To increase our hope the holy Scripture heaps up wonderful sayings about the immense depth of God's mercies.

1. THE Lord God himself, in the prophecy of Ezechiel, not only promises to forgive the man who repents, but also to forget all his past evil doings. For after he has spoken of every kind of wickedness and crime, his gracious Majesty adds: *If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed, and keepeth all my commandments and do judgement and justice, living he shall live and shall not die. I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done. . . . Is it my will that a sinner should die, saith the Lord, and not that he should be converted from his ways and live?*† And a little further on we read: *Be converted and do*

* Ps. xciv 8. † Ezec. xviii 27.

*penance for all your iniquities, and your iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which you have transgressed, and make to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit: why will you die, O house of Israel? For I desire not the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; return ye and live.**

O miserable sinner, why shouldst thou despair, seeing that God has sent his Son to earth for the very object of giving thee hope? Of this great attribute of God the Psalmist speaks, when he says:

We have received thy mercy, O God,
In the midst of thy temple.†

Be in the temple; remain steadfastly in the Church of God and in the Catholic faith, and receive mercy. God cries out to you: *I desire not the death of the wicked, but that he should be converted and live.* Listen to this most joyous voice; shake off thy fatal sleep; rise with Christ, that thou mayest live in him. Hear his voice, clear as a trumpet note; listen to his promise: "In whatever hour the sinner shall mourn, I will not remember all his sins." He makes no exception; the promise depends not on the degree of greatness or the multitude of past iniquities. Only repent in the right

* *Cf.* Ps. l. † Ps. xlvii 10.

way, and God is ready to forget all thy past sins.

2. In order to render thy petition more pleasing to the Lord, he has himself given us, through the mouth of Osee the prophet, a form of prayer that we can use: *Return, O Israel, to the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen down by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and return to the Lord, and say to him : Take away all iniquity and receive the good, and we will render the calves of our lips.** Let us also return, for in many ways have we strayed; let us return to him who alone *takes away the sins of the world,* who for our sins shed his Precious Blood, and let us say to him: *Take from us all the evil we have done, and receive the good.* What good? *The calves of our lips.* We will give thanks to thy mercy, to which we owe whatever good we have done. Take from us what is our own, and receive from us what is thine.

3. The Lord God says, by the mouth of Joel: *Turn to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil.*† The greatness of thy sins casts thee down, but the greatness of God's mercy raises thee up. Think what the

* Osee xiv 2, 3.

† Joel ii 13. (That is of the punishment threatened. —TRANSLATOR.)

prophet, just quoted, says to impress on your mind God's mercy: *He is gracious.* To this, though enough in itself, in order to encourage us more, he adds, *and merciful,* to show that he not only helps us, but that he feels sympathy for our miseries. Not yet content, the prophet adds the word *patient.* Dost thou still feel despair, O sinner? Hear then what follows: *And rich in mercy.* If thy sins are many, be of good cheer; he hath much store of mercy, for he is rich in mercy. What remains then but to be converted, and to accept this invitation? Threats of punishment alarm thee. Hear once more, and breathe more freely: He is *ready to repent of the evil.* He himself, whom thou hast so often offended, of his own accord urges thee to repent, invites thee to receive pardon, ceases his threats, remits the pains of hell, offers thee loving-kindness instead of punishment, and so far from turning away from the penitent sinner, of his own accord he goes forth to meet him, and folds him in his outstretched arms.

This is, indeed, in accordance with his promise through Zacharias, in these words: *Turn ye to me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn to you.** What is meant by *turn to me?* Acknowledge your misery, and earnestly ask for mercy. What is meant by

* Zach. i 3.

the words, *And I will turn to you?* Forthwith, from an avenger am I become a helper; I will help your endeavours, that what you cannot do by your own strength you may attain by my favour. No one can hate his sins in a way to gain salvation unless God gives contrition; unless he deigns to take away the heart of stone and bestow one of flesh; unless he *creates a clean heart within us*, instead of the one we have stained; unless, in place of our bad spirit, he is pleased to *renew a right spirit within us*.

SECTION IV

SWEET COMFORT FROM THE GOSPEL

1. The whole life, teaching, miracles and sufferings of Christ show us the abundance of God's mercy.
2. Those who sought and obtained the mercy of Christ.
3. The tears of Christ and the joy of the angels.

1. READ with attention the whole life of Christ, what dost thou see there except perpetual mercy for all? As a gracious favour he cured the sick, fed the hungry, helped those in danger, cleansed the lepers, gave sight to the blind, strengthened the weak, healed the maimed, cast out devils, raised the dead, absolved penitent sinners. Again examine his whole teaching, what is its prevailing tone, except the immense mercy of God? How

many of his parables impress this truth on our souls, lest perchance it might escape us! For what else is the moral of the parable of the sheep carried back on the shoulders of the shepherd, of the drachma lost and found, of the whole who need not the physician, of the servant whose whole debt was forgiven? again of the moneylender who forgave two debtors, of the Publican and Pharisee, of the good Samaritan, of the unjust steward kind to the debtors, of the prodigal son? Even the very name "Gospel," is it not a promise of mercy? For what does it promise? Light to the blind, freedom to captives, deliverance to those shut up, to proclaim the acceptable year of our God, who thirsteth for nothing else than the salvation of man.*

The very name, JESUS, that is Saviour, what else doth it promise the sinner than salvation and mercy? If he had come with the office of judge, then we should have grave reason to be afraid; now, however, listen to the name of his office—SAVIOUR. Hearing this dost thou still despair of salvation? Lastly, that our confidence might be established more firmly, the Son of God himself ascended the altar of the cross, sacrificed himself for our sins, and became the efficacious victim of expiation for all the iniquities of all men.

* *Cf.* Isa. lxi.

Hanging upon the cross he prayed for those who crucified him, for those who insulted and mocked him; and dost thou, knowing all this, for one moment imagine that he will refuse pardon to thee acknowledging thy sins and imploring mercy? Trust to the merciful One, and mercy shalt thou find. True and firm confidence will gain all things from Christ. He who distrusts the doctor, makes health more difficult.

2. *Examples from the New Testament.*

The woman of Canaan cries out, and her daughter is cured;* the Centurion trusts, and his servant is healed;† the chief of the synagogue asks, and his daughter lives again;‡ a father prays, and his son is freed from a malignant devil;§ the apostles cry out, *Lord save us, we perish,*‖ and all are saved.

In many cases he did not even wait for prayers to be expressed. He sees the faith of the bearers, and says to the sick of the palsy, *Son, thy sins are forgiven thee.*¶ The mother and the crowd weep, and the young man that was dead returns to life.** Martha and Mary only lament with tears, and Lazarus is raised.††

* *Cf.* Matt. xv 22.
† *Cf.* Matt. viii 5.
‡ *Cf.* Matt. ix 18.
§ *Cf.* Matt. xvii 14.
‖ Matt. viii 25.
¶ Mark ii 5.
** *Cf.* Luke vii 12.
†† *Cf.* John xi.

Mary, the sinner, mourns, anoints and kisses his feet, and hears, *Thy sins are forgiven thee.* He asks enough who acknowledges he is sick; he earnestly petitions who weeps and trusts. The woman suffering from an issue of blood secretly touches the hem of his garment, and thence feels the virtue of mercy go out from him.*

Many others were healed by a touch of the garments of Jesus. His mercy is always ready; on every occasion he helps the miserable. Even if thou dost not feel confidence enough to constrain Jesus, if thou canst not summon courage enough to touch Jesus, at least secretly touch the hem of his garment, that is, go to some saint, in whom loving pity is evidently seen, that by his prayers he may commend thee to the merciful Lord. Through these his friends he often sends forth his virtue, for in every possible way is he always prepared to show mercy. This was the very reason he came, this was his bread, to bring sinners to repentance. O blind sinners! O ungrateful men! Why neglect ye the mercy of the Lord, so close to you, so ready prepared to your hands? But still more miserable are any who despair of a gift so freely, so graciously offered. Easily is he softened, who hates to punish. What other meaning

* *Cf.* Luke viii 43.

can be given to those words, pathetic and pleading:

Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ;
*Why will you die, O house of Israel?**

3. There is nothing the Lord has not done to save us, and shall we abandon the hope of salvation? In the Gospel we see him weeping over Jerusalem, that by obstinate sin had called down destruction. How touching are the words: *How often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not!*† The Lord of mercy weeps, because he is not allowed to save the miserable, and shall we distrust him, as if he did not desire to save us? In the Gospel the whole house rings with joy, because the *son who was dead is come to life again, he who was lost is found.*‡ That good Father calls upon the whole company of angels and saints to rejoice with him, because one sinner does penance; and thou, wretched man, dost thou despair, dost thou grudge thy Lord the immense joy of saving thy soul? The death of the sinner fills him with anguish, the conversion of the wicked rejoices his heart; can we then believe that he will refuse pardon to those who repent

* Ezec. xxxiii 11. † Matt. xxiii 37.
‡ Luke xv.

and do penance? He invites all to the marriage-feast, he desires his house to be filled, even the blind and the lame he compels to enter. Why dost thou hesitate, miserable sinner? Art thou not able to tear thyself from the husks of swine? Why fightest thou against God's mercy?

SECTION V

MERCY URGES TO CHANGE OF LIFE, NEVER CAN GIVE LICENCE TO SIN

1. The treasure of mercy is inexhaustible, and is distributed to those desiring to change their lives for the better, so that they can in a certain sense claim it from God by his promise.
2. The Son promises pardon to true penitents; the Father stands surety for it; the Holy Ghost, in the meantime, is bestowed as an earnest or pledge of it.
3. Most dangerous to delay conversion, presuming on God's mercy. If this has been done, despair not.

1. WHAT can be imagined more foolish than to barter eternal goods for things passing and momentary? On the other hand, what can be wiser than to purchase immortality by bearing short trials? All they who remain in sin act as fools; they only are wise who change for the better. With what labour do we search for gold and other metals of no intrinsic

value, and shall we despise the treasure offered to us gratuitously ?* What could be more foolish ? *God is rich in mercy.*† The greatest treasure of earthly riches is at last exhausted by constant distribution; the treasure of God's mercy is absolutely inexhaustible. God has bound himself and pledged his faith, and, as St Paul says, *He continueth faithful ; he cannot deny himself.*‡ He refuses not to be accused if he should not have given what he has promised. So he deigns to speak by Isaias, the prophet, to the people stained by sin. *Wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices from my eyes, cease to do perversely, learn to do well, seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge for the fatherless, defend the widow, and then come and accuse me,§ saith the Lord.*‖

Dost thou hear, sinner ? What else does the merciful Lord ask of thee except change of life ?¶ And to prevent the enormity of thy sins from casting thee down, listen to the promise of pardon: *If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow ; and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool.*

* *Cf.* Isa. lv 1. † Eph. ii 4.

‡ 2 Tim. ii 13.

§ Or, " Let us reason together."

‖ Isa. i 16-18.

¶ Change of life to be of the right kind must include contrition, confession, satisfaction, and works worthy of penance, actually or by desire.

*If you be willing, and will hearken to me, you shall eat the good things of the Land.**

Who can be mad enough not to wish to be saved? What can be easier than to obey a most loving Father, commanding nothing except what promotes our happiness?

2. Why, O miserable child of Eve, why dost thou listen to the serpent alluring thee to death by false promises, and dost refuse to listen to the words of the Son of God, inviting thee to the fellowship of eternal happiness? *Do penance,* he says, by the mouth of John the Baptist, *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*†

The Son promises, the Father stands surety, the Holy Ghost in the meantime is given as an earnest and pledge. Wilt thou hesitate to receive so great a benefit offered thee? The apostles teach the same as their Lord: *Peter said to them, Do penance, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*‡ Leave behind a life filthy, foul and wretched, and embrace life everlasting. Soldiers, publicans, harlots, idolaters, parricides, all kinds of sinners, run to him. No one is excluded; to all equally lies open the road to mercy. Thy past life will not be cast up against thee, provided only

* Isa. i 18. † Matt. iii 2.
‡ Acts ii 38.

that true penitence and correction of thy life follow.

3. As the land frequently watered by the rain from heaven and *bringing forth nothing but thorns and briars is reprobate, and very near unto a curse, whose end is to be burnt,** so God sometimes, in punishment of obstinate contempt of his goodness, delivers over sinners to a reprobate sense. Wherefore it is most prudent not to delay conversion to him,† but immediately to obey the voice of the Lord, inviting us to *put off at once the old man with his evil deeds and concupiscences*, lest, if so many times we refuse to listen to the Lord, he may perhaps turn away his face and not hear us when we cry unto him. In the book of Proverbs there is a very terrible threat against those who have refused to hear his voice when he lovingly invited them. *Because I called, and you refused ; I stretched out my hand, and there was none that regarded. You have despised all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof. I also will laugh at your destruction, and will mock when that cometh which you feared. When sudden calamity shall fall on you, and destruction as a tempest shall be at hand ; when tribulation and distress shall come upon you. Then shall they call on me, and I will not hear ; they shall rise in*

* Heb. vi 8. † *Cf.* Ecclus. v 4-9.

*the morning and shall not find me. Because they have hated instruction and received not the fear of the Lord, nor consented to my counsel, but despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices.**

As long as life lasts, there is hope of mercy. Therefore, as long as ever thou livest, pray the Lord for mercy and correct thy life.

SECTION VI

SOME EXAMPLES OF SINNERS WHO HAVE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF GOD'S MERCY

1. David and Peter.
2. How devoutly David did penance.
3. The Canaanean, the blind beggar and the penitent thief.
4. The prodigal and the publican.
5. Cain and Judas.
6. Many of those who crucified Christ repented.
7. Despair increases sin.

1. Our Lord, providing in every way for our salvation, has allowed great and illustrious men to fall into serious sins, that by their example we may be comforted and encouraged to hope for pardon. Who is more highly praised in the sacred writings than David? He was a king and a prophet, a man according to God's own heart, of whose family Christ was pro-

* Prov. i 24-32.

mised. But into what a hideous and complicated crime did not this great man fall? From Nathan he heard the reproof and the severe threats of the Lord.* And David, repenting, turned all the anger of God into mercy by two words: *I have sinned,* he said, *against the Lord.* And Nathan answered: *The Lord hath taken away thy sin, thou shalt not die.* The threats against him were long, but how speedily came the voice of mercy: *Thou shalt not die!*

God also allowed Peter, who was to be the head of his Church, to fall in a most remarkable way. He wept, and found mercy. When the Lord committed to him the care of his sheep, for whom he had died, that he as shepherd might feed them, did he upbraid him for the crime of thrice denying his Lord? By no means. All that miserable fall had been so completely blotted out by his tears of repentance that no vestige even of it remained in the memory of the merciful Lord. Striking examples have we of men sinning; their repentance was equally striking. No one by such examples must imagine he can sin with impunity or use them to encourage himself to sin, for that would be "tempting the Lord." But if a man has already sinned, and is already caught in the

* *Cf.* 2 Kings xii.

devil's snare, he has at hand these examples of repentance, lest he might be tempted to despair.* They certainly act with the utmost folly who, after following these men by sinning, refuse to follow the example of their repentance.

2. David, after frankly confessing his sin and acknowledging that he deserved God's punishment, yet expressed the utmost confidence in the mercy of God. Hear his hopeful words:

Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed;
Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.†

By the sprinkling of the Blood of the Immaculate Lamb he promises cleansing to himself; he acknowledges that *he was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did his mother conceive him;* nevertheless from this washing he looks forward to the whiteness of innocence, a whiteness surpassing that of snow. Nor does he hope only for restored innocence, but,

* None of us should say: David sinned, so may I; St Peter denied his Lord, so may I; but we should say: David and St Peter repented without delay, so will I; they wept for their sins, so must I; their sin was ever before them and their contrition sincere and habitual, so shall mine be; they brought forth fruits worthy of penance, so will I by God's grace.—TRANSLATOR.

† Ps. l 7.

moreover, that the sadness of penitence will be changed into spiritual joy.

To my hearing thou shalt give joy and gladness ;
*And the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice.**

Wonderful confidence of a repenting sinner !

3. Was there ever any one who lovingly† cried out, *Jesus, have mercy on me,* without at once receiving mercy? The woman of Canaan cries out: *Have mercy on me, O Lord,*‡ and her daughter is cured. Let any sinner cry out: *Have mercy on me, O Lord,* and his soul will be healed. The *blind man that sat by the wayside begging*§ cried out: *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me,*‖ and, casting off his garment, leaping up and coming to him, received his sight. We also must cry out: *Jesu, Son of David, have mercy on me.* We must cry out earnestly and constantly amidst the crowds, not of men as the blind man did, but of bad thoughts making a noise within us; and though we are poor men begging in this world, Christ will make us heirs of the kingdom of heaven. The altar of mercy is before thee, the gate of the city of refuge stands open, and wilt thou cast thyself into the pit of miserable despair? Thy Saviour stretches

* Ps. 18.

† *Pie,* piously, devoutly, affectionately, lovingly.—TRANSLATOR.

‡ Matt. xv 22.

§ Luke xviii 38.

‖ Mark x 50.

forth his hand, and wilt thou turn away thy face? Heaven is unlocked for thee, and wilt thou throw thyself down the precipice? The heart of God's goodness is open for thee, and wilt thou fly to the miserable snare of the devil? The thief on the cross hears, *This day thou shalt be with me in paradise*, and wilt thou consign thyself to hell?

4. The mercy of God came to us when the Son of God descended to the earth; let us, in our turn, come to him. The most merciful Lord *stooped down** that he might forgive the woman taken in adultery; we must on our side raise up our hearts to him stooping towards us.

The first step is to cast away evil things. Thus doctors reduce the body, that afterwards they may fill it with new strength. Do thou, O sinner, vomit forth from thy soul bad desires which fight against God—lust, avarice, excess, pride, anger and all other vices—that God may find room to pour his grace into thy soul. He who wilfully remains in sin, and implores the mercy of God, is he not like an armed slave, and an enemy brandishing his sword and still holding his shield, while at the same moment asking for peace from his King and his Lord?

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to

* John viii 6.

*you.** If you ask for mercy, ask aright; if you seek, seek aright; if you knock at the door of mercy, knock aright. Dost thou desire to see an example of one asking aright? The prodigal son asked and sought aright, for he had already left the swine and had returned to his father. To him he said: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee: make me as one of thy hired servants.*†

Hear also the publican who, conscious of so many sins, did not dare to raise his eyes to heaven, did not dare to draw near to the mercy-seat, but, standing at a distance, struck his breast, saying: *Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.*

5. St Jerome declares that Judas sinned more grievously by despairing of salvation than by betraying Christ, as also Cain offended God more terribly by his despair of pardon than by the murder of his brother Abel.

6. St Augustine reminds us that many of those who were concerned in putting Christ to death, afterwards converted to Christ and believing in him, obtained pardon by the outpouring of his blood, thus giving example to all not to think any sin too bad to be forgiven when even the crime of putting Christ himself to death was forgiven to those confessing their guilt.

* Luke xi 9. † Luke xv 18, 19.

7. The same St Augustine* also writes: "Dost thou wish to have the mercy of God? Give up sin, and thy sins will be forgiven. Dost thou desire to hear the truth of the Lord? Hold fast to justice, and justice will crown thee. God is not merciful in the sense of being unjust, nor is he just in the sense of not being merciful. Is this a small mercy, that he does not impute to thee all thy former sins?"

Perhaps some one will object, and say: "The hope of pardon makes men sin more boldly." But I answer: "Despair of pardon will make men sin still more." If there were not forgiveness of sin, wouldst thou not say: "Already I am a sinner; already I am wicked; already lost. There is no hope of pardon; why should I not take my fling, and do just what I like? Why should I not indulge myself in any way I please, since after what I have already done, nothing remains for me but torments?" Wouldst thou not speak thus, and grow worse through despair of pardon? Therefore he works thy amendment by promising pardon, and saying: *I will not the death of the wicked, but that he should return and live.*

God does not make sinners safe in the way of iniquity by his gracious promise of mercy. He promises this harbour of refuge lest men

* *Enarratio in Ps.*

might grow worse through despair. On the other hand, lest men should live a worse life through hope of forgiveness, God has made the day of death uncertain. He has promised thee pardon if thou dost repent: to-morrow he has not promised thee. Therefore if thou hast lived badly up to this day, thou art still alive: live well to-day. Amend thy ways: God forgives thee. Be certain that what he has forgiven he will never impute to thee.*

* Can any one read this chapter of Blosius without singing:

O praise the Lord, all ye nations,
Praise him all ye people:
For his mercy is confirmed towards us,
And the truth of the Lord endureth for ever.
(Ps. cxvi)?

CHAPTER XXXIX

COMFORT IN THE DISCOURAGEMENT SPRINGING FROM FREQUENT FALLS INTO FAULTS IN MEN OF GOOD WILL

1. Though thy falls be many, never lose courage.
2. The elect, though they may often fall, always rise quickly.
3. However many our temptations, even though there may be many or even great sins, if only we repent we are not shut out from the fruit of the Precious Blood.

1. When God has bestowed on thee a good will, so that now, having no affection to any sin, thou hast determined to lead a better life, and dost desire and strive to please God, if it should happen that frequently every day there are faults and falls from human weakness, rise bravely as often as thou fallest, and never in any way despair of God's mercy, which is immense. In this very thing indeed is God most worthy of praise and love, that he receiveth penitent sinners so gently. This is his special characteristic, for *it is his nature always to have mercy and to spare.**

* See the prayer after the Litany of the Saints:

Let us pray.

O God, whose property it is always to have mercy and to spare, receive our humble petition, that we,

2. As the blessed father St Bernard teaches, the elect are in this respect different from the reprobate. The reprobate when they fall into sin do not busy themselves to rise up again, but the elect immediately strive to rise after a fall and to advance once more.* Therefore, whenever thou findest that in some matter thou hast fallen, immediately turn thy soul with humble confidence to thy most merciful Lord God, take hold of his most kind hand, which is always stretched out to help thee when thou returnest to him, kiss that loving hand and be of good cheer. Take heed not to allow thyself to omit any of thy good works and pious exercises on account of the disgust that arises from frequent falls. Pluck up courage. Renew thy good purpose. Say to thy soul: Come now, my soul, once more must we practise virtue and strive after holiness, just as if we had not offended God; for this is pleasing to the Lord. As to the vices which still live in thee, and which make thee fear thou art rather slipping back than going forward, do not allow thyself to be much troubled, but fight bravely against thine evil inclinations. Although thou feelest in thy-

and all thy servants who are bound by the chains of sin, may by thy loving kindness mercifully be absolved. Through Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord.

* *Sermon II on Psalm* xc, *Qui habitat.*

self motions of evil, if thou dost not consent to the evil, if thou fightest manfully against sin, thou receivest much benefit instead of any injury.

We sometimes meet with people who are such victims to the ungoverned passion of fear that all they do, however good, they imagine to be displeasing to God. Such a vain thought, so foolish an idea, should be carefully dispelled and rejected.

3. That holy virgin, Catherine of Siena, speaks as follows in one of her letters: " I beg you never to leave off the good things you have begun, however persistently the devil may annoy you with troublesome temptations. His object in thus harassing and worrying you with various evil temptations that war against the soul, is simply to weary you out, to cast you into deep sadness, to perplex your mind and to make you inclined to throw up all effort to advance, saying, ' It is no use trying.' But always remember that, even if all the sins that have been committed were recorded against you, or any other man, still all this guilt could in no way hinder you from receiving into your soul the fruit of the Blood of the SON of GOD, as long as you retained true faith and hope in God's infinite mercy."

Since sin can only dwell in a bad and obstinate will, when any one sees that God has given

him a good will,* he ought bravely to cast away all depression of soul, to persevere in good works and holy exercises, and to walk in the light of grace which he has found hidden in his soul by the bounty of God, who keeps him in good will.†

When the evil spirit suggests things to disturb the mind and to discourage, he should resolutely answer: If God's grace were not with me I should have no good will, and I should follow your vile suggestions and your wicked temptations. But now I trust entirely in the loving-kindness of my Lord, Jesus Christ, who will always take care of me, will always save me, through his immense mercy and goodness.

I have been humbled, O Lord, exceedingly,
Quicken thou me according to thy word.
Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy;
And teach me thy justifications, [that is thy will]
making me just, holy.‡

* Notice that a good will is God's gift, and must be asked for earnestly. It is never idle or careless, but implies real effort to do God's will and to resist the devil. "They do not love who do not show their love."—TRANSLATOR.

† *Cf.* John xiv 1. ‡ Ps. cxviii 107, 124.

CHAPTER XL

INTERNAL CONVERSATION, IN WHICH JESUS CHRIST COMFORTS A SINFUL SOUL THAT NOW DESIRES TO LEAD A BETTER LIFE

SECTION I

HOW A FAITHFUL SOUL MAY ATTAIN TO CONTRITION FOR SIN

1. The wounds of Christ excite loving sorrow.
2. When sorrow is genuine.
3. The devil before sin promises safety, after sin suggests discouragement.
4. Another stratagem of the evil one.
5. Steps of true repentance leading to God.

1. THE passion of Christ demands a return of love.

I love them that love me :
And those that seek me early in the morning shall find me.
*My delights are to be with the children of men.**

I have so loved the world that I gave up my life and died, *that whosoever believeth in me may not perish, but may have life everlasting.*† O beloved soul, my daughter, for thee have I laboured, hungered, thirsted and borne contempt and persecution. *I was wounded for thy transgressions, I was bruised for thy sins,*‡

* Prov. viii 17, 31; *Cf.* 1 Kings ii 30; Ps. xc 14; John xiv 21. † John iii 16. ‡ Isa. liii 5.

I died for thy iniquities, I rose for thy justification. Driven by my love to thee I did and suffered all these things. I choose thee as my adopted daughter. Therefore, as now thou dost repent, come back to me, wash thyself in the blood flowing from my wounds, clothe thyself with the merits of my life and virtues. All these most freely do I give thee, yea, with fatherly love do I offer them to thee, I run forward to embrace thee, I receive thee with the kiss of peace, I invite thee to return to my love. Return, O daughter, and be clean. Give me thy heart, for I desire from thee nothing else.

2. To grieve that thou dost not grieve is true sorrow and enough for the sacrament of Penance. Grieve for thy sins because thou hast offended me, or at least grieve because thou dost not feel that thou grievest. For very often it is more pleasing to me and better for a man himself to will to be contrite, or devout, than to feel contrition or devotion, because to desire to have it and not to feel it produces humble sorrow of heart. Therefore grieve, and let thy wrath be kindled against thyself, and condemn thyself and look on thyself as worthy to be condemned because thou hast sinned, and because thou dost not grieve as much as is becoming.

This kind of contrition, although it does not

affect the feelings, that is, it leaves the heart feeling hard, arid and dry, still suffices for salvation. For I am well aware of thy misery, thy weakness, thy poverty. A man of good will must never be discouraged, whatever degree of coldness or dryness of heart he may feel, as long as he wishes he had not sinned and is determined for my sake not to sin again.

But thou wilt say: " I have sinned, O Lord, in numberless ways. How can I be sorry for all these things separately ?"

Thou needest comfort, daughter, but truth only can comfort thee. If thou hast many sins, have general contrition for the whole multitude together, desire to include all and every particular sin, so that there may be no sin whatever, known or forgotten, which thou dost in any way love. Let there be none that thou dost not desire to detest, avoid and leave behind thee. This general contrition will extend to all sins, even secret and forgotten. I do not require thee, necessarily, to make separate acts of contrition for every separate sin and for every kind of sin. Think what I said of St Mary Magdalen: *Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much.* I did not say, Because she hath loved oftentimes. Nor could Mary Magdalen in so sudden a compunction do more than grieve once for all for every one of her sins together. Do thou

also grieve in the same way for all sins, so that there be no sin for which thou hast any affection, whether it be actually remembered or only included in general.

3. *A crafty snare of the devil.*

Take heed not to be cast down with undue sadness. Reject foolish imaginations and idle fancies, for example, that I am wroth with thee, so that thou canst not please me; that my will is not to forgive thee and never to receive thee into favour. These, and many like things, are only suggestions of the devil, by which he desires to discourage thee and to lead thee to despair.

Know well that it is one of his crafty devices in the beginning, when tempting a man to sin, to try to make the heart forget me, to promise my mercy, to inspire false security in order to encourage the sinner to go on boldly and obstinately in doing his own bad will. But directly he sees that sinners desire to give him up, if he cannot keep them in sin by other temptations, he begins to assail their souls, now full of fear, with the temptation of discouragement and despair. He tries to persuade them not to confess their sins. He suggests that their bad habits are too strong to be broken through. He terrifies them with the greatness of their sins, falsely saying that I do not will to forgive sin.

Daughter, believe him not. Whatever thou mayest feel never yield to despair. This contrition sufficeth, that thou art sorry that I have been offended (although thy heart feel dry), that thou dost wish I had not been offended, and that thou dost resolve never more to sin.

If thou shouldst sin again, again arise and renew thy good purpose not to sin any more. If a third time thou fallest, rise a third time. If a fourth or fifth time, if in fact seventy times seven falls should happen daily, come back to me every time, and I will always receive thee.

Is it not better that I should receive thee, than that I should lose thee, and, with thee, all the labours and pains that I endured for thy salvation? Let nothing, O daughter redeemed by my blood, make thee withdraw from me or cause thee to delay in coming to me. If the devil should betray thee, if a hundred times thou hast denied me, if thou hast trampled under foot me and my image, if thou hast spat upon me, if thou hast treated my sacraments with contempt, grieve for what thou hast done and I will forgive thy sin. Let no sin be so great in thy eyes as to take away hope of pardon. Let no number of sins appear to thee so enormous as to surpass in number my mercies. There is no more difficulty for me to free thee from many than from few

sins. A great and a lesser sinner both equally need my mercy, the fountain of which is inexhaustible in its abundance. Thy malice cannot conquer my mercy. The greater the number of thy sins, the more willingly do I forgive when there is repentance. For my glory doth shine out the more when I show mercy to a greater sinner. I am not hard, I am not sparing, but towards thee, O my daughter, most generous, nay lavish.

4. *Another favourite trick of the devil.*

Another thing perchance may terrify thee. Weighed down with the thought of thy sins, thou art unwillingly obliged to bear what formerly thou didst wilfully entertain. The enemy persecutes thee, and suggests foul thoughts to thy mind. Remember, my daughter, that nothing against thy will can condemn thee or deprive thee of my grace. For sin is so absolutely voluntary in its nature that unless it is free and voluntary it cannot be sin. Restrain therefore thy will from consent, and then let thy lower nature and the devil storm as they like. Of dreams also have no fear; whatever happens in sleep can never injure thee so long as before sleep and after waking, when thou hast the command of reason, thou dost hate all evil suggestions. And even supposing that evil habits of past life are the cause of these things, because thou

hast repented and tried to do better, these matters cannot be sins unless the will deliberately consents. Again, if it should sometimes happen that the devil should whisper in thy heart blasphemies against me or my saints, or other abominations, do not be cast down, for remember this principle, that whenever there is no consent of the will, thou sufferest these things but dost them not, thou art not the active agent but passive under attack.

When, therefore, thou dost not delight in these things but they give thee sorrow and affliction, thou must in no way fear them. Nor shouldst thou accuse thyself of them in confession. I allow thee to feel these attacks to purify thee, not to bring thee guilt. The devil's object in thus molesting thee is, that whilst thou art occupied in resisting these things, thou mayest be kept back and hindered from tasting the sweetness of my charity, and, feeling full of consternation, thou mayest be afraid to draw near me. For he rejoices when he manages to agitate thee with scruples and fears. The best way to baffle him, therefore, my daughter, is to entertain no fear. Take no notice. Answer not a word. Do not trouble thyself to resist or even to advert to what he represents to thy imagination. Go on quietly with what thou

art doing as if there were no temptation, passing over and despising these matters as if they were dogs barking or geese hissing. If instead of this thou troublest thyself to resist, to dispute, to fear, to discuss these things in thy mind, the effect will be to impress these abominations more on thy memory and to disturb the peace of thy soul.

5. *Steps of True Penitence.*

(1) After the penitent soul has understood something of my goodness, it is filled with astonishment and admiration. It is amazed to find that my mercy is so great that not only do I not cast up past sins against the repenting sinner to impute them to him, but that I receive him into my friendship just as if he had never been guilty at all; I grant him grace, comfort him and bestow my gifts upon him.

(2) Seeing all this, touched with loving gratitude, he finds that his past falls afford him fresh occasion of fervent love.

(3) The same considerations fill him with a greater degree of self-hatred and displeasure, he is wroth with himself and detests himself for having despised me, his loving God, who although I could justly have condemned and destroyed him have on the contrary spared and consoled him, and showered down benefits upon him.

(4) The effect of these feelings is that the more clearly he sees my mercy towards him, the greater indignation does he feel against himself, as if he desired to avenge on himself the contempt he has manifested to me.

(5) From this it comes to pass that not content with seeking pardon for his sins and a return to my favour, he also desires to suffer, to be humiliated and punished for his past wicked opposition to me. Wherefore, the more he finds himself comforted by me, the more he abhors and detests his own unworthiness, grieves for the enormity of his sins, is more and more indignant with himself and filled with wonder that he could have been so ungrateful to me.

When a soul has risen to this degree of zeal against itself and loveth my justice as much as my mercy, then its sins are all consumed as a little drop of water in a blazing furnace. Therefore no kind of repentance can be better than constantly to consider my immense charity and faithfulness towards thee, and at the same time thy unfaithfulness, ingratitude and obstinacy towards me.

SECTION II

CONFESSION AND SATISFACTION NEED DISCRETION

1. Repeating confessions to be avoided according to the advice of a skilful confessor.
2. One of the useful effects of confession is to learn our own vileness.
3. Satisfaction.

1. THE devil is accustomed to lie in ambush when converted souls are grieving over their sins, as well as at all other times. One of his crafty snares is to try to render my servants and handmaidens scrupulous, and to urge them to confess the same sins over and over again, so that they never arrive at any tranquillity of mind. For they distrust all their confessions, always discovering some circumstance or sin that they have not remembered to confess, and thus consider themselves bound to make their confessions again.

Such persons ought to make once for all a general confession and then entirely to put away this unreasonable disquiet. It is of the greatest importance that they should humbly and without any hesitation follow the advice of a discreet father confessor, and they should obey him as they would obey me myself, putting away entirely their own judgement, prudence and feelings, and acting against their own erroneous conscience. It is not my

desire that thou shouldst be always wallowing in the mire, and defiling thyself, by persistently thinking of past sins. Instead of this, cast all thy care on me, and I will deliver thee. The truth is that, if thou didst continue for a thousand years thus examining and confessing, thou wouldst still never be cleansed.* For how canst thou exhaust an abyss?

Commit thyself then with secure confidence to me when once thou hast tried with all diligence to confess all thy sins. Allow me to have some point on which I may show thee mercy. Acknowledge that thou thyself canst never cleanse thyself, but that thou dost always need my mercy. Confess that thou canst not answer to me for one thing in a thousand, that in everything thou failest and dost need my mercy. Trust not then so much in thy confessions, but in my mercies, for it is they that will justify thee. Instead of thus troubling thy mind too anxiously about thy sins, thou oughtest to be carefully turning to me and enjoying my gracious presence.

* No one, by scrupulous examinations and confessions, can prevent there being always many hidden defects, known only to God, in the dark recesses of the soul, about which we should say with David *From my secret sins cleanse me, O God* (Ps. xviii). In this connection it is useful to read the whole of the ninth chapter of the Book of Job.—TRANSLATOR.

Canst thou not see that this is a snare of the enemy? For thus it cometh to pass that thou art troubling about the number of some past sins and calling to mind past foul things, and all the time neglecting really profitable considerations that would kindle thy love and devotion.

Know then and understand that what especially pleaseth me is that thou shouldst think of my goodness and shouldst seek me with a simple and humble heart. Think of me as kind, loving, full of tenderness, merciful and full of goodness. Trust in me, hope in me. Seek my favour and familiar friendship, and direct thy prayers and exercises of devotion to attain these things. Without doubt thou wilt gather far riper fruit if thou shouldst diligently think how thou lovest me, how thou canst please me, in what manner thou canst imitate me, than by confessing again things already confessed, or looking into and examining scruples, and thus rousing up many new ones in trying in the wrong way to quiet the old ones.

Thou canst not possibly have too high an idea of my loving-kindness and mercy, as long as thou dost not abuse my mercy as a license to sin. Thou canst not trust in me too much. Let this then be the constant employment of thy soul, to think of my

goodness and to believe that I do not desire to condemn thee; for in good truth I desire to condemn no one who desires to correct his evil ways and does not despair. It satisfies me that thou art sorry for thy sins and art resolved not to sin again. Thou art in a state of grace; why dost thou fear? Rich am I in infinite mercies. Let this be thy thought about me. Thus wilt thou give me greater honour than by imagining me to be a cruel and hard master, or by living in constant fear, as if I were only watching how to catch and entrap men, if perchance they should neglect to confess this or that scruple, or this or that circumstance connected with their sins.

When, however, some sin certainly mortal comes to thy memory, not confessed before, accuse thyself of it, but with all tranquillity of mind. When once a careful examination before a general confession has been made, afterwards reject scruples, do not again examine thy conscience nor disturb the peace of thy soul by always confessing over again. Instead of scrupulous investigation and examination of conscience give thyself to other spiritual exercises likely to foster love. If thou dost not adopt this course, but art determined to examine and look into every fear that arises, a thousand snares will be prepared for thee. As I have already said, when once

thou hast made an earnest general confession of all thy sins with the full purpose of hiding nothing that ought to be confessed, afterwards remain in peace, and cast back at the devil all scruples that may arise. I want thy love, I desire to enjoy thy friendship, I seek to be loved by thee; take heed therefore to correspond with my will.

2. Understand, acknowledge and judge thyself to be a sinful soul. Know that thou hast in many things offended, that thou hast been most ungrateful, a rebel, insulting and blasphemous, that thou hast gone against my commandments and desires. Humble thyself. Thou shouldst not dare even to lift up thine eyes in my presence since thou art full of vileness and abominations. There are some who remember their sins as a matter of ridicule or even of delight; others by the thought of past sin are moved to despair or to other hurtful things. The chief reason of these false notions is the fact that they look at their sins without regard to me. They look at sin in itself, turn their attention to it, speak of it and discuss it, but not in its relation to me. While they do this, even with some good intention, they rather increase the darkness of their souls than become illuminated.

But do thou, when thou thinkest of thyself as a sinner, when thou dost desire to humble

thyself on account of sin, take care to put away all imaginations of the sin itself, and occupy thyself with me, converse with me about thy sins, thy weaknesses, thy defects. Lay before me the complaints about thyself. Speak to me. Accuse thyself of anything thou hast done amiss to me. In this way will it come to pass that the very acknowledgement of thy sins will be changed into prayer. Turn therefore to me, treat of thy sins by prayer, for in this way thy conscience, instead of being troubled and agitated with fear, will become calm and quiet, and the will and affections being directed to me will be kindled by love.*

3. Concerning satisfaction for sin, this is my advice to thee. Whatever thy hand can do, that do without delay. But do it not with the mistaken idea that thou thyself art able to make satisfaction for thy sins.† Understand clearly that thy own works are far too imperfect to make any worthy satisfaction to me. Look upon all penance thou mayest be able to do as an utterly unequal compensation for sin, but do all thou canst to please me whom thou hast offended.

Beg of me, that by the merits of my most

* *Cf.* Ps. xxiv 15.

† Of thyself only, without the merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ.

holy life and passion, I may blot out thy sins and may make satisfaction for them to my Father. This humility and confidence in me, by which thou dost esteem all thy own works as vile and worthless, but dost magnify me and my merits, will far surpass in the way of satisfaction everything thou couldst do thyself, for one drop of my blood hath more power of satisfaction than all human merits,* whence it maketh satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. This humility and confidence cause me to bow down to thee, that I may make the treasure of my merits belong also to thee.

On this account thy chief desire should be to neglect nothing that will please me, to think of me, long for me and love me always, and diligently to do whatever I have commanded, either directly by my own words, or indirectly through my vicars, yea, everything whatsoever, that is my Will. With this disposition of mind even if thy sins were heaped up mountains high and were multiplied by thousands of thousands, I forgive all, as if they were one. For it is not less easy for me to forgive many sins than few.

* Because the value of satisfaction increases with the dignity of the person making it. The Person of Christ is divine, and therefore his least satisfaction is infinite in value.—*Cf.* St Thomas, *Summa*, part III, quæst. 1, art. 2.

What I am now going to say is indeed wonderful, but must be believed with most certain and undoubted faith. If the whole world were one globe of fire, and a little shred of linen were thrown into its midst it would not be so quickly burnt up as the abyss of my mercies receives a penitent sinner who desires to be converted. For in that merely natural burning of the shred of linen, some slight fraction of time would be necessary although so minute as to be perhaps quite imperceptible, but there is absolutely no interval of time between penitence and remission, between the groan of contrition and the answer of forgiveness.

I have trusted in thy mercy, my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation :
I will sing to the Lord who giveth me good things ;
*Yea, I will sing to the name of the Lord, the most High.**

* Ps. xii 6.

SECTION III

OF THE INWARD RENEWAL AND HOLINESS OF A SOUL TURNED TO GOD AND ITS RESIGNATION TO TRIALS AND DEATH

1. List of holy exercises for a soul desiring God only.
2. By entire abandonment to God, the soul should be ready to do everything pleasing to him.
3. Death the gate of heaven to those loving not the world but God.
4. Better not to know whether we shall die in God's grace, that we may trust all to him, not to ourselves.

1. Do thou, therefore, my daughter, cast away all undue and unmortified fear. Desire, with thy whole heart, to please me; strive to become holy, because I am holy.

(1) Thy first care must be to commit no wilful sin, however small or light it may appear.

(2) As far as possible, fly away from all occasions of sin.

(3) Prudently withdraw thyself from unnecessary familiarity with others, from useless conversation and talk, and from all vain gratifications, idle occupations and useless affairs.

(4) As far as possible, seek solitude and silence.

(5) Spend thy time in some useful way for my honour.

(6) Devoutly reflect on my life and passion.

(7) Plant in thy heart the flowering tree of my cross.

(8) Frequently send forth to me, thy crucified spouse and thy God, loving aspirations by word and desire.

(9) Walk before me with holy fear and reverence, believing me to be everywhere present and seeing all thou doest.

(10) Diligently strive to govern thy senses.

(11) Keep careful guard over thy tongue. If thou lovest much talking, progress is impossible.

(12) Be sober and moderate in all things as reason demands.

(13) Avoid vanity and the pride of foolish display.

(14) Thou must not indulge sensual delights and unlawful pleasures; as far as possible keep thyself untouched by them.

(15) Manfully combat vice.

(16) Earnestly pray to me to bestow on thee the strength to overcome and break down the power of evil passions and inclinations.

(17) It is good always to strive to do all thou canst; but do not trust to thine own endeavours, but in the help of my grace, for if thou puttest thy confidence in thyself and thine own carefulness thou wilt easily fall.

(18) When thou hast done anything good,

be careful not to take the credit to thyself, and never attribute to thyself gifts that belong to me. Of thyself, thou canst only offend; of thyself, thou hast only sin. The evil of sin is really thine own.

(19) It is vanity to desire to please a mere mortal man.

(20) Desire rather to be unknown and despised than to be known and honoured.

(21) Never think thyself to be anything, and do not entertain a high idea of thine own works and spiritual exercises, but try sincerely to believe that thou art the most unworthy, ungrateful and vile of all.

(22) Lower thyself in thine own esteem, and humble thyself beneath all for my sake.

(23) Love all men, even those who persecute thee, with true charity, and desire the salvation of all.

(24) Despise no one.

(25) Despair of the salvation of no one.

(26) Detract no one.

(27) Judge no one.

(28) Whatever thou seest in others, or hearest of them, always put on it the best possible interpretation.

(29) Mortify self-will with all earnestness.

(30) Love my will only, with undivided affection.

(31) For love of me, willingly and promptly obey men in all that is lawful.

(32) Abandon thine own opinion.

(33) Deny thyself in all things.

(34) With tranquil mind commit thyself to me, and trust in my providence. Hope in me firmly in every temptation, danger and necessity, for I have care of thee.* In fact I attend to thy welfare as diligently and with as much interest as if thou alone didst live in the world.

2. *Resignation teaches the soul to bear all things.*

Learn, my daughter, to receive every trial and affliction from my hand only; learn to bear it patiently to the end, for the love of me. For tribulation is the chalice of blessing of which all my holy ones drink. No saint is there that has not borne some trial and cross either external or internal. Cast away then all faint-heartedness and receive from my hand whatever happens to thee, and believe that I have sent this out of my immense love for the salvation of thy soul. To suffer adversity is the royal road leading man to the kingdom of heaven. Walk, therefore, in it with a joyful spirit, giving me thanks for the honour I do to thee by offering thee the valuable gift of suffering. When any one troubles thee, injures or despises thee, consider that he does

* *Cf.* 2 Pet. v 7; Ps. liv 23.

this at my command. Be not wroth with him, say no stinging or bitter words, and dream not of revenge. In fact look not at the man, who is my instrument and scourge, but at me, who permit these things to happen. In this way wilt thou be able in any tribulations and griefs to remain humble, to practise patience and to resign thyself to me. For by means of afflictions I purify and render thee fit and worthy to be united to me. If, through human weakness, thou shouldst fall into impatience or any other fault, do not be cast down and waver in thy good purpose through discouragement, but immediately rise (as I said before), turn to me, and call upon me with sure hope of pardon. I know well the weakness of human nature in general and thy own special weakness, which is so great. Trust in me. Thy hope and confidence in me cannot possibly be too great, provided only thy life be good and penitent. Therefore fly always at once to me; I will receive thee, I will heal thee, I will protect thee.

3. Dost thou still fear, my daughter? Wherefore dost thou not now even desire death? What evil would death bring thee? Remember that after death thou wouldst never again offend me, never again would sin defile thee. If thou lovest nothing in this world, death can take nothing from thee. If, on the

other hand, thou lovest something in this world in a way dangerous to thee, thou lovest the danger. Before death comes, therefore, cease to love worldly and passing things, that death may not frighten thee too much.

If thou lovest me only in this life, rejoice because thou hast to die; for never, except by death, canst thou reach him that thou lovest.

But I understand what thou fearest. It is not the loss of anything in this world, for nothing dost thou possess that thou art unwilling to lose. A fearful dread makes thee shrink from the idea of death, because thou knowest not whether thou art worthy of love or hatred; thou canst not feel certain how thou wilt be received by me, whether to rest or to punishment.

4. *Certain knowledge is not expedient.*

This, my daughter, it is not necessary to know, it is not expedient that thou shouldst know for certain. Although there may be fear, remain in hope and confidence in me, whether thou livest or diest. Thou canst not of thine own strength live well, neither canst thou die well of thyself. Both of these favours thou canst have only from me. I have given thee grace to live well, why dost thou fear that I shall refuse thee grace to die well? Since thou hast all from me, and lookest for all from my goodness, why shouldst

thou hope for the one and feel misgivings about the other? Of thyself it is indeed true that thou canst not either live well or die well. Trust, therefore, throw all thy thought upon me, cast all thy fear and anxiety upon me. As with thine own strength thou canst not resist any temptation, and canst not escape sin in life, neither canst thou in death. If, during thy life, I am faithful to thee, succour thee in danger, and moderate the force of temptations, at the time of death I shall certainly do the same. Thou dost not engage the enemy with thine own sword,* neither doth thine own arm save thee, but my right hand and my arm and the light of my countenance. When I fight for thee and protect thee, what hast thou to fear?

Moreover, the particular circumstances and kind of death prepared for thee should not cause thee anxiety.† No kind of death can injure the righteous, for however suddenly it may carry him away, he will be in a place of rest and refreshment.

Be not, therefore, anxious whether thou

* *Cf.* Ps. xliii 4.

† St Ambrose in his treatise, *De bono mortis*, and St Cyprian in his book entitled *De Immortalitate*, teach that no kind of death should be feared by the righteous, especially when they have been accustomed to prepare for death during life.

wilt die at home or abroad, in thy bed or in the field, nor trouble thyself as to whether thy death will be a natural one or the result of violence.

In order to die well and happily, take the utmost care to live, as my apostle admonisheth thee, soberly, justly and godly. An evil death followeth not a good life; but precious in my sight is the death of all saints, in whatever way their life may finish, whether it be suddenly by water or by fire, or whether by sickness they die quietly in their beds.

The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God;
And the torment of death shall not touch them.
In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die :
And their departure was taken for misery :
And their going away from us for utter destruction :
BUT THEY ARE IN PEACE.*

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for THOU art with me.†

The Lord is my Light and my Salvation ; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the Protector of my life ; of whom shall I be afraid?
Wait thou on the Lord ;
Be manful and let thy heart take courage :
Yea, wait thou on the LORD.‡

* Wisd. iii 1. † Ps. xxii 4.
‡ Ps. xxvi.

DIVINE COMFORT

Taken from the Holy Scriptures

*Be comforted, be comforted, my people, saith your God. Strengthen ye the feeble hands, and confirm the weak knees.**

Say to the faint-hearted: Take courage and fear not; behold, your God himself will come and save you.†

All you that thirst, come to the waters, and you that have no money, make haste, buy and eat; come ye, buy wine and milk without money and without any price. Hearken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good, and your soul shall be delighted in fatness.‡

To him that thirsteth I will give of the water of the fountain of life freely. He that shall overcome shall possess these things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.§

I am the Lord thy God . . . showing mercy unto thousands, to them that love me and keep my commandments.‖

I love them that love me; and they that in the morning early watch for me shall find me.¶

I know the thoughts that I think towards you,

* Isa. xl i.
† Isa. xxxv 4.
‡ Isa. lv 1, 2.
§ Apoc. xxi 6.
‖ Exod. xx 5, 6.
¶ Prov. viii 17.

saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of affliction, to give you an end and patience [or hope in your latter end]. *And you shall call upon me, and you shall go; and you shall pray to me, and I will hear you* [or, you shall go and pray to me]. *You shall seek me, and you shall find me, when you shall seek me with all your heart.**

I have formed thee, thou art my servant, forget me not; I have blotted out thine iniquities as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist; return to me, for I have redeemed thee.†

Be converted to me, and you shall be saved.‡

He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of my eye.§

Incline your ears, and come to me; hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the faithful mercies of David.‖

And you shall know that I am the Lord when I shall have done well by you, for my own name's sake, and not according to your evil ways, nor according to your wicked deeds.¶

*It is not for your sakes that I will do this, saith the Lord God, be it known to you; be confounded and ashamed of your ways, O house of Israel.***

* Jer. xxix 11-13. † Isa. xliv. 21.
‡ Isa. xlv 22. § Zach. ii 8.
‖ Isa. lv 3. ¶ Ezec. xx 44. ** Ezec. xxxvi 32.

*I am the Lord ; that is my name.**

As the shepherd visiteth his flock, so will I visit my sheep, and I will feed them.†

And my people shall sit in the beauty of peace, and in the tabernacles of confidence and in wealthy rest.‡

I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love.§

The bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not quench.‖

For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a moment of wrath have I hidden my face a little while from thee, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer.¶

*Is my hand shortened and become little, that I cannot redeem, or is there no power in me to deliver ?***

Even to your old age I am the same, and to your grey hairs will I carry you. I have made you, and I will bear you [or, with you]. *I will carry you and will save you.*††

I am the Lord thy God, who teach thee useful things, governing thee in the way thou walkest.‡‡

* Isa. xlii 8. † Ezec. xxxiv 12.
‡ Isa. xxxii 18. § Osee xi 4.
‖ Isa. xlii 3. ¶ Isa. liv 7, 8.
** Isa. l 2. †† Isa. xlvi 4. ‡‡ Isa. xlviii 17.

*I will show thee all good . . . and I will have mercy on whom I will, and I will be merciful to them that please me.**

I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee.†

I will espouse thee to me for ever.‡

If you return and be quiet, you shall be saved; in silence and in hope shall your strength be.§

Thus saith the high and the eminent One that inhabiteth eternity; whose name is holy, that dwelleth in the high and holy place, and with a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.‖

But unto you who fear my name, the sun of justice shall arise.¶

*For you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace.***

My people shall not be confounded for ever.††

If he cry to me I will hear him, because I am compassionate.‡‡

For I am the Lord thy God, who take thee by the hand, and say to thee : Fear not, I have helped thee.§§

* Exod. xxxiii 19.
† Jer. xxxi 3.
‡ Osee ii 19.
§ Isa. xxx 15.
‖ Isa. lvii 15.
¶ Mal. iv 2.
** Isa. lv 12.
†† Joel ii 26.
‡‡ Exod. xxii 27.
§§ Isa. xli 13.

*And it shall come to pass that, before they call, I will hear ; as they are yet speaking, I will hear.**

I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.†

Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall hear ; thou shalt cry, and he shall say : Here I am.‡

As one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you.§

I, I myself will comfort you.‖

And Sion said : The Lord hath forsaken me, the Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? Even if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee.¶

*Fear not, for I have redeemed thee and called thee by thy name : thou art mine. Fear not, for I am with thee.***

I am, I am the Lord, and there is no Saviour besides me.††

Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Shall anything be hard for me?‡‡

Thy life shall be saved, because thou hast put thy trust in me.§§

* Isa. lxv 24.
‡ Isa. lviii 9.
‖ Isa. li 12.
** Isa. xliii 1.
‡‡ Jer. xxxii 27.
† Jer. xxxi 34.
§ Isa. lxvi 13.
¶ Isa. xlix 14, 15.
†† Isa. xliii 11.
§§ Jer. xxxix 18.

*Destruction is thine own; thy help is only in Me.**

They shall be as though I had not cast them off.†

Sing praises and rejoice, for behold I come and will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord.‡

Fear not : I am the First and the Last, am alive and was dead ; and, behold, I live for ever and ever, and have the keys of death and of hell.§

To him that shall overcome I will give to sit with me on my throne, as I have overcome and have sat down with my Father on his throne.‖

God's Characteristics

I KNOW *thou art God, gracious and merciful, patient and of much compassion and easily moved to forgive.*¶

*Thou, O Lord, art the God of compassion, and merciful, patient and of much mercy and true.***

For God is compassionate and merciful, and will forgive sins in the day of tribulation : and he is a protector of all that seek him in truth.††

* Osee xiii 9.
† Zach. x 6.
‡ Zach. ii 10.
§ Apoc. i 17.
‖ Apoc. iii 21.
¶ Jonas iv 2.
** Ps. lxxxv 15.
†† Ecclus. ii 13.

Aspirations from Psalm CII about God's Mercy

1. *BLESS the Lord, O my soul :*
   And all that that is within me bless his holy name.
2. *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*
3. *He forgiveth all thine iniquities :*
   He healeth all thy diseases.
4. *He redeemeth thy life from destruction :*
   He crowneth thee with mercy and compassion.
5. *He satisfieth thy desire* with good things :*
   So that thy youth is renewed like the eagle.
8. *The Lord is compassionate and merciful ;*
   Long-suffering and plenteous in mercy.
9. *He will not always be angry :*
   Nor will he threaten for ever.
10. *He hath not dealt with us according to our sins :*
    Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
11. *For as high as the heaven is above the earth :*
    So hath he strengthened his mercy towards them that fear him.

* Notice we get the good things we desire. So our desires should be strong.

12. *As far as the east is from the west :*
So far hath he removed our iniquities from us.
13. *As a father hath pity on his children :*
So hath the Lord pity upon them that fear him.
14. *For he knoweth whereof we are made :*
He remembereth that we are but dust.
17. *But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting :*
Upon them that fear him.

Alleluia. Thanks be to God. Alleluia.

A LETTER

WRITTEN BY THE HOLY ABBOT BLOSIUS TO A FRIEND

THIS lettter, which is undated in the printed edition, is interesting for two reasons: first, because Blosius mentions the good effect wrought in the soul of the brother of the friend he is addressing, by his reading the COMFORT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED; secondly, because it is such a characteristic letter, so clearly revealing the soul of Blosius, his zeal tempered with such extraordinary sweetness, gentleness, prudence, calmness and love. His spiritual character and direction bear a striking resemblance to that of St Francis de Sales, whom he preceded by only a few years. Blosius had been dead only one year when St Francis de Sales was born in 1567.

St Francis must have known the works of Blosius, and they may have helped to form his spirit of humble meekness and sweet charity.

With this letter, Blosius sent to his friend a book he had written, called the *CONCLAVE ANIMAE FIDELIS*, the SANCTUARY, OR CELL, OF THE FAITHFUL SOUL, consisting of four parts: the SPIRITUAL MIRROR, the SPIRITUAL NECKLACE, the SPIRITUAL CROWN, and the SPIRITUAL CASKET. This book was

first published in 1558, nine years before the birth of St Francis de Sales, and eight years before the death of Blosius.

The Letter to G——

1. With this letter I send you, beloved friend in Christ, G——, the book called *CONCLAVE ANIMAE,* which you have so earnestly desired to see. When not long ago I wrote, for your use as well as my own, the Spiritual Mirror, I determined to write nothing more; but afterwards, finding that you would not be satisfied unless I added three other treatises, I have written also the Spiritual Necklace, the Spiritual Crown and the Spiritual Casket; so now all four are found in one spiritual *conclave,* or cell. Lately it was sent to the press according to your desire, and as we may well hope by the disposition and providence of God.

And now, my dear friend, if amid all your various studies and occupations you can find time and inclination to read the simple books written by me, I advise you particularly to enter this spiritual cell, and to give the matters found there your serious attention and thought; then I recommend you to take the book called The Recreation of the Soul,*

* Published in 1549.

the contents of which I collected some years ago from the writings of St Augustine and St Gregory. The doctrine of the fathers brought together in these two little books will comfort and encourage you, as you are a man of good will, and will awaken within you the love of God and of our heavenly country. You must not become weary of reading these and other pious things repeatedly, even if the actual reading at the time gives but little savour to the palate of your heart. For he is too fastidious who looks askance at holy and salutary things once read or heard, and does not desire to read or hear them again.

I give thanks to the Lord Jesus that your brother C—— is less tormented by unmortified fear since he read the COMFORT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED, published by me. He ought to know that he has received this relief from God and from the holy fathers quoted in that work.

2. He does perfectly right in lamenting and grieving that in his past life he has so gravely and so frequently offended God; he must, however, take courage, and trust in the immense and most sweet mercy of God. He must remember that many of those even who had joined in putting Christ himself to death, afterwards, by believing in him, received pardon, in order that all men may learn that

there is no crime so terrible, no guilt so enormous that the Lord of mercy and loving-kindness does not will to forgive those converted to him by true repentance. This is the great characteristic of the most holy God, *whose property it is to have mercy and to spare* those who humble themselves and ask pardon from their hearts. Your brother is also quite right in acknowledging that he is still most imperfect, but he must remember that in the eyes of Christ the imperfect are not of less consequence than the most perfect.

3. That wandering of mind that he complains of in prayer is an affliction shared in by numberless servants of God. There is no reason for him to be too much alarmed at it; for if his mind is unwillingly distracted, and he does what he reasonably can to keep his attention, his prayer poured forth humbly in the midst of this distraction is often more useful and more fruitful than if it were accompanied with great attention of heart. For God is highly pleased with his good desire, will and endeavour, and purifies his soul by means of these and other annoyances. By such trials he keeps his soul pure, and adorns it. Exhort him to be always of good heart.

4. If only he tries to bear these troubles, and also his almost constant bad health, with a patient and resigned heart for God's sake,

he may be certain that when he lays down the heavy and galling burden of his corruptible body he will obtain everlasting happiness and health.

5. Therefore, very dear friend, I pray that we may both diligently watch over ourselves, and that we may try to live as true Christians. Let us employ all the remaining time of our life here below in a really useful manner. In all that we do, let us look only at the praise and glory of God. Let us love Jesus, who loveth us with a love most intense and burning. For his honour let us mortify in ourselves, to the best of our power, our own corrupt self-will and our vices.

6. Let us subject and conform ourselves in all things to the Divine will. Let us keep our mind humble and resigned, constantly desiring and striving to please our Lord. In this way shall we in the end arrive at that highest and most joyful good. In order to obtain this good, we were created to the Image of God and redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. We shall come, I repeat, to God, who is the abyss of love, the fountain of all light, beauty, excellence, sweetness and riches. Then shall we be truly happy, seeing and possessing that which infinitely surpasseth all the beauties of this world, for we shall contemplate in the light of glory the

face of God, sweeter than honey in the honeycomb; in that vision shall we rest with unspeakable enjoyment; we shall enter into a state of peace that can never be disturbed. Then shall we be filled with inconceivable joy. Every desire will be completely satisfied; we shall love God perfectly, and praise him for ever and ever.*

Oh, what happiness to see God face to face! And, on the other hand, what extremity of misery to be deprived of that vision, to be cast into hell and there tormented for ever!

Farewell in the Lord, and pray for me.

* *Cf.* Ps. cxviii 103; Ps. xviii 11; Cant. v 1; Ecclus. xxiv 27.

NOTES

Note A (*page* 17).

This comforting doctrine about the power of contrition to obtain from God the perfect forgiveness of the guilt of sin, and also of all penalty due to it, is taught by St Thomas (*Sum.* III, qu. 86, art. 1 and 4, and Supplement qu. 5, art. 2).

There is no question here as to the kind and amount of sorrow necessary for the sacrament of penance. What is called "attrition"—that is, sincere hatred of sin for some supernatural motive not so perfect and disinterested as the love of God for his own sake—is sufficient to obtain pardon of mortal sin in the sacrament of penance. For example, if a man sincerely detested sin because it would deprive him of heaven, or because he feared hell or purgatory, this "attrition" would be sufficient to obtain pardon from God in the merciful tribunal of penance.

But, in Chapter VII, Blosius and Tauler are speaking of the power of an act of contrition to obtain from the merciful and loving God pardon of the guilt of sin, and at the same time of all the temporal punishment due to it. Contrition means the sincere hatred of sin because it displeases and opposes God, who is so good. If we love God's Will and hate sin because it is contrary to God's Will, then we hate it for the love of God, and we make an act of contrition. This act, being an act of supernatural charity, "obtains at once from God the pardon of the guilt of all sin"; and, if the act of the will turning from sin to God be sufficiently intense, it obtains also the pardon of all the temporal penalty due to sin.

In this matter there is a common confusion of ideas

which does considerable practical harm. People do not distinguish between two things that are widely different—namely, the act of contrition and the act of intense and perfect contrition. The consequence is that they imagine it to be exceedingly difficult to make an act of contrition, and therefore consider it hopeless to try to do so.

We must understand therefore that an act of contrition, however remiss and imperfect it may be, as long as it is really contrition, is sufficient to obtain forgiveness of mortal sin. Directly the love of God is the chief and predominant motive of our hatred of sin God forgives it. We may at the same time have many other less perfect motives—desire of heaven as a good for ourselves, a fear of hell as an evil for ourselves—but immediately the love of God is the chief and predominant motive, his mercy forgives us. If we are able, by God's grace, to say to him sincerely: "O my God, even without thinking of reward or punishment, because sin is contrary to thy Will and displeasing to thee, I hate it and turn away from it," we make an act of contrition and the guilt is immediately forgiven. In the case of mortal sin the obligation of confession remains, though the guilt of the sin has been forgiven and is utterly and eternally blotted out. If the man afterwards refused to confess the sin he would commit another mortal sin, but the guilt of the one blotted out by contrition can never revive. Such is the mercy of God, our Father.

As God's grace and help is necessary for this as for every other supernatural act, before making an act of contrition we must ask God to help us; but, with this help, who can think that for a man of good will it is difficult to hate sin, and to turn the will from it, because we love God?

It is, no doubt, difficult and rare for a soul to make so pure and intense an act of contrition as to obtain at once from God the pardon not only of all guilt but of all temporal punishment also; but it is easy, if we implore God to help us, to make an act of contrition, the predominant and real motive of which is the love of God, who is so infinitely good, though this act of contrition may be greatly wanting in intensity of will. St Thomas distinctly teaches that, " however remiss " may be the charity of the soul to God, on which the contrition is founded, the soul is restored to grace. The reason is that charity is the life of the soul; if, therefore, there is real charity in the soul it must be alive, that is in grace. The soul cannot be alive by charity, however slight and remiss, and at the same time dead by mortal sin. If contrition can thus blot out mortal sin, how much more easily venial sin !

This is an exceedingly practical point, and the common confusion of ideas produces lamentable consequences.

From it comes (1) the hideous idea that if a man has unhappily fallen into mortal sin he must live in that dreadful state till he can get to confession. He should instantly turn to God by acts of contrition.

(2) Constant discouragement arising from considering God to be a hard Master instead of a tenderly-loving Father, and imagining it to be so difficult to regain his grace if in a moment of weakness it has been lost.

(3) Want of effort to cleanse the soul by acts of contrition, imagining that these acts can only be made by very saintly people.

A moment's reflection will show that if contrition must be perfect in intensity in order to obtain pardon from God for the guilt of sin, then no one who had fallen into mortal sin, and died without going to

confession, could go to purgatory. The soul would of necessity go straight either to heaven or to hell. It would be useless to pray for such a soul after death. This absurd consequence will show at once that there must be a wide difference between the contrition necessary to obtain the pardon of sin from God and the perfect contrition necessary to secure also the pardon of all temporal punishment. For the former, contrition, however remiss the degree of love may be, is enough; for the latter, the contrition and resignation must be very intense in degree.

Note B (*page* 33).

When St Thomas teaches that forgiven sins never can return *simpliciter*, he means that their guilt, once blotted out, can never again return to condemn the sinner. *The gifts . . . of God are without repentance* (Rom. xi 29). No part of the guilt can revive.

But when he says that the sins may revive *secundum quid*, he means that the fact of having sinned before and having been forgiven renders future sins more ungrateful.

Also if a man has committed fifty sins and has been forgiven, if he again sins, that is not the first but the fifty-first sin. As there is a fixed, though unknown, number beyond which the sinner will not repent, the fact of many forgiven sins should raise fear. *Be not without fear about sin forgiven, and add not sin upon sin* (Ecclus. v 5).

Note C (*page* 122, *par.* 6).

The aged prophet might have expected to live longer, for though a hundred and twenty years old, *his eye was not dim nor his teeth moved*, nor his natural strength abated; yet he died, alone with God, on the solitary

mountain, as a punishment for a venial sin of want of confidence in God, not "sanctifying" or glorifying God before the people at the waters of contradiction. This was the temporal punishment in this world of a wilful venial sin, which in a man whom *the Lord knew face to face* (Deut. xxxiv 10) was worse than in those not having his exalted graces. He seemed at first not quite resigned, and begged God to allow him to enter the promised land and to have the joy of that triumph. But God was not pleased with this prayer, and answered, *It is enough; speak to me no more of this matter* (Deut. iii 26). Then Moses made an act of entire abandonment and resignation into God's hands. This is a meditation of great spiritual utility, as teaching us God's ways, the wonderful union of justice and mercy, severity and tender loving-kindness. In this connection, Cardinal Newman writes:

Moses, the patriot fierce, became
The meekest man on earth,
To show us how love's quickening flame
Can give our souls new birth.

Moses, the man of meekest heart,
Lost Canaan by self-will,
To show, where grace has done its part,
How sin defiles us still.

Thou, who hast taught me in thy fear,
Yet seest me frail at best,
Oh, grant me loss with Moses here,
To gain his future rest!

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